
SIGISMAR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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K SIGISMAR.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF VILLEROY.

See thyself, devil!
Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.

SHAKESPEARE.

I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke—

POPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

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1799.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following sheets were written six years since, with no other view than to beguile, of their bitterness, some hours of anxious leisure. Perhaps the best proof I could give of my gratitude for the relief they then afforded me, would be to suffer them to remain in undisturbed obscurity; and this had certainly been their fate, had not some pleasing recollections of the approbation bestowed on a former production still played about my heart. In saying this, I do not presume to speak of the opinion of the world in general, but of that of a few dear friends, who were the world to me; most of whom, it is my greatest felicity to say, still are left me, and who will, with avidity, peruse this second literary attempt. From them I have

have nothing to fear, except that their affection may bias their judgment: from the rest of mankind I have nearly as little to apprehend; their plaudits might, indeed, gratify my vanity; but their censure, much as I should tremble at it in other respects, could in this but slightly affect me, as neither fame nor fortune are to be obtained by the writing of novels; and, if they were, I feel my desires and abilities so exceedingly moderate, and so equally poised, as to make it impossible for me to go beyond what should serve as my amusement. I cannot, however deny, that the approbation, particularly of my own sex, would, on this occasion, afford me infinite satisfaction; my motive I will assign, and leave them to decide whether it is wholly selfish.

Chance having, a few months since, brought Sigismar from that oblivion into
which

which some years of busy scenes had plunged it, a friend, probably a partial one, but one in whose judgment I have long placed my confidence, said that it ought to be published; and, for that purpose, sent it to a conspicuous publisher of novels, who, after some unmerited encomiums on the performance, lamented the taste of the times, which would not suffer him to become a purchaser of *so moral a tale*. Somewhat surprised, but nothing dismayed by this excuse, it was offered to a second, and again returned, with an assurance that it was *too moral for the females of the present day*.

A glow of indignation suffused my cheek—the honour of my sex became concerned—and I determined to prove on what foundation so degrading an opinion was built: happily for my purpose, the third bookseller to whom it was sent,
either

either thought more favourably of the delicate part of the creation, or had the temerity to oppose its prejudices.

Thus Sigismar stands at the public tribunal, and I wish that all its failings were confined to its morality: I should then fearlessly meet the eye of criticism; but as I feel that this is far, very far from being the truth, and that I send it forth loaded with faults and infirmities, too glaringly conspicuous, I am reduced to confess, that I differ so widely from the two first mentioned bibliopolists, as to found my only hope of its success on the very morality which they foreboded would prove its condemnation.

London,

October 19, 1799.

SIGISMAR.

LETTER I.

MISS HOWARD TO MRS. PAULET.

HAS not my Maria's heart been vexed by my unkind silence? such, I am sure, she must have thought it; yet, she could not think her Emma could, without a cause, forego one of the greatest pleasures of her life! No! there has been a cause, but such a one as she almost blushes to mention: What think you of company, dress, and engagements? Aye! you may smile, but it is true; know then, that the deanry doors have been thrown open to the whole neighbourhood for these last ten

VOL I. B days;

days ; and to add to your surprise, know, also, that a visit from our aunt, the Countess of N——, has been the occasion of all this disturbance in our family, for such it really has appeared to me, unused, as I am, to bustle of any kind.

My time, you well know, since I left school, has been, with little variation, spent in the sweet employment of endeavouring successfully to assuage the grief of a revered parent for the loss of a beloved wife, and in assisting him, by my care and economy, to discharge those debts which a long and expensive illness had obliged him to contract. Had the air of Italy but preserved her life for one day, this best of men would have thought himself well repaid for the years of penury he knew must follow ; but he has now, in addition to her loss, the distress of seeing himself surrounded by a family of children, whose sole subsistence depends

depends on the precarious tenure of his life ; but stop, my pen, for I am discoursing on a subject that will run away with me, and I set out with giving my friend an idea that I was to write of pleasure, dress, and fashion, not to pain her feeling heart by the recollection of what the dead have suffered, or what the living do.

I told you the Countess of N—— had made us a visit ; it was a very unexpected one, as this was the first notice she had honoured us with since the death of her sister, my lamented mother. My father had been informed, the day before her ladyship's arrival, of the favor she intended him, which, in some degree, prepared us for an event that we looked forward to with different sensations ; my father's countenance betrayed symptoms of uneasiness mixed with hope, which I thus interpreted : that the former arose from his parental fears, lest the content of

his daughters might be disturbed by the splendour they saw attendant on riches; and the latter, that the event of this visit might be fortunate to them by the noble visitor allotting a small part of her large means for their portion. The hope is realized in the establishment of one of his daughters; the fear I trust never will; I think the want of riches can never plant discontent in the bosoms of the others: I am again digressing——.

Matilda's face was illumined by joy; eager expectation and gladness sat on every feature; George, who had come from Oxford a few days before, wore a look of indifference; he seemed to have neither hope nor fears. If my countenance was a true index of what passed within, it bespoke much of the latter; conscious of my entire ignorance of high life, I dreaded the ridicule my awkwardness would subject me to, which
would

would be doubly conspicuous by my being obliged to do the honours of the house, a task which, at that time, appeared to me impossible I could go through with any thing like satisfaction to myself, much less to her I was to entertain: and my fears had increased my natural timidity to such a degree, that I waited the moment, when her ladyship should be announced, in a state of terror and confusion.—It at length arrived, and my anxiety was instantly dispelled; there was such grace, kindness, and condescension in her look, voice, and manner. She appeared so pleased with every one, and every thing around her, that we were all at ease with ourselves, and, of course, delighted with her.

There is a charm, Maria, in true good breeding that is irresistible, particularly when it is shown from the superior to the inferior: how little do the great study
B 3 their

their own aggrandisement when they stoop to insult those in an humbler rank of life, by making them feel their superiority: but, I believe, such conduct seldom proceeds from the really dignified, either by birth or talents; it is the little great, the gentry of yesterday, who, sensible of their own deficiencies, or raised above what they ever could have expected, think they must do something to bring themselves into notice, and, by their folly, excite the contempt of the very people they wish to be thought above; whilst a contrary conduct would have insured them respect, by proving they were not unworthy of the good fortune which chance had thrown in their way. Forgive me, my dear Maria, but the comparison I could not help drawing between the behaviour of the Countess, and the lady of our Bishop, who honoured us with a call during our aunt's stay, and at the same time was careful to inform us, we would not have been so favoured, had

had she not known the Countess was with us, has led me to make this remark :

But to return : we were all too much delighted with our guest to leave any thing undone we thought could contribute to her entertainment ; to this end our mornings were spent in riding out to view distant prospects ; and some part of the neighbourhood were invited to pass the evenings. I often believed her ladyship's sincerity was sacrificed to her politeness, for she was frequently in raptures with the beauties of the landscape, when, I am convinced, had you asked whether it lay on a hill, or in a valley, she could not have told you : but my father, who is always silent when it would be unmannerly to speak the truth, judges of others by himself, and, of course, supposed his noble sister's transports were unfeigned, and congratulated himself on having it in his power to make her time pass so pleasantly ;

fantly; nor were the evenings less productive of amusement; not a visitant in which her ladyship did not find something to admire, although, to do them justice, we cannot boast of much elegance in our vicinity.

Thus passed a week, when, in one of our morning excursions, my father, struck with the beauty of the scene before him, spoke in the most animated language, of the goodness of the great Creator of the universe, who had been so bounteous to the beings which he had formed; the Countess's silence leading him to conclude she was absorbed in admiration, though, had he looked at her he would have seen, that she was employed so earnestly in examining the beauties of a tooth-pick case, as to have rendered her alike insensible to those which nature produced, and that which fell from the tongue of the venerable moralist, who proceeded to expatiate

patiate on the wonderful works of Omnipotence. Her ladyship still continued her employment, till my father, addressing himself to her, said, "My dear sister, I will conduct you to this spot two months hence, when it will be robbed of its verdure, and clothed in the solemn, but majestic garb of winter; we will come early, that we may see the glorious sun ascend yon mountain." At the words two months hence, she had started from her reverie, and gazed at him with astonishment, till he had finished his speech; when, recollecting herself, she thanked him with every appearance of sincerity, and declared she should long for the time, though I saw her shiver at the bare mention of seeing the sun ascend the mountain. On our return home she retired to her apartment, but soon returned, bringing a letter in her hand, and going up to her brother with an air of discontent, she said, "My dear Dean, this ugly paper has

put an end to the pleasure I hoped to have enjoyed in this charming retreat ; it contains a summons for me to repair to London, and that without loss of time ; but, as I cannot endure to quit this society all at once, you must not refuse me the company of my god-daughter, the sweet Matilda. I already feel for her the affection of a parent, and shall hence forward consider her as my child ;” then turning to me, she took my hand, saying, “ I should also have intreated my dearest Emma to have favoured me with her presence, did I not know how impossible it is for the worthy Dean to part with such a treasure. Your brother too, my elegant George, that cruel university prevents all chance of my shewing him London ; but you will all have a share in my heart.”

We were all gratitude in return for her goodness, and it was determined Matilda should accompany her, for whom she
consented,

consented, notwithstanding the pressing nature of her call to town, to wait three days, at the end of which time she departed, leaving all who had conversed with her, filled with admiration of her mental and personal endowments, which cannot be matter of astonishment, as I believe there is scarcely one of them who do not think they have received some particular mark of regard from her; as to myself, although I early saw she seldom meant any thing she spoke, I could not refrain from being pleased with her flattery. You, my Maria, will see her in your visits to Matilda; do tell me if all women of fashion are like her, if they are, I thank my stars I am secluded from their society; for should they not be as good as they are agreeable, I should tremble, lest they should lead me into vice, by persuading me it was virtue.

May my sister, my dear Matilda, acquire the amiable part of her aunt's character, but avoid the foible in it, or I fear the balance will be against her. I hardly need say how I already feel the loss of the dear girl, for Maria knows the affection there has ever been between us. Write to me, my friend, your letters will now be doubly acceptable to your lonely

EMMA HOWARD.

LETTER

LETTER II.

MRS. PAULET TO MISS HOWARD.

THE moment I had read my Emma's letter, containing information of her sister's being in town, I drove to Portland Place, eager to renew my acquaintance with her, and to talk over the events of our school-days. On my name being announced, she flew to meet me, and, throwing her arms about my neck, kissed both my cheeks in the most lively, yet unaffected manner, tears glistening in her eyes ; the momentary sensation being over, her ideas returned to the occupation which had engaged them before my entrance ; and, catching my hand, she hurried me up to her dressing-room, which had more the appearance of a mercer's warehouse, than what it really was, being spread in every
part

part with silks and gauzes, laces, flowers, feathers, fringes, ribbons, caps, hats, and in short every article of fashionable dress, which two or three females, and as many males, were anxiously waiting her approval of. A chair being cleared, I sat down to wait the dismissal of the interested crew; in the interim my attention was engaged in attending to the person and actions of Matilda: the first was so altered in the space of four years, which had elapsed since I parted from her at school, that I should, had I met her unexpectedly, hardly have recollected her. She was then, I think, just fifteen, and promised to be handsome, but not the beautiful creature she now is : why, she is a perfect divinity! never did I behold any woman before her, whose person I could pronounce faultless! she, in my eyes, is perfect. The same uncommon vivacity and playfulness which gained her the love of every one when she was a child, seems to have

have grown up with her. You would have been amused to have seen her tripping about the room, first to the glass, then to me, now with a cap, then with a hat, then some other article, begging me to choose for her, and without waiting till I could speak, hurrying to something else; then choosing for herself, and, in a moment repenting of her choice, and changing it.

This important business being at length finally settled, though in truth not before my patience was quite exhausted, we descended to a drawing-room, where we found the Countess surrounded by a circle of, if not the most worthy, they were at least the most fashionable company in town. Matilda presented me as her dear friend and school-fellow; her ladyship received me with infinite politeness; I now enquired after all my acquaintances at the deanry, and asked your sister if she had

had heard from you since her arrival? she replied that she had not; I said, I supposed, although she had been but three days in London, she had given you a long history, as of course the evening had related the events of each day. She coloured excessively, and answered, in the most artless manner; "No, Maria, I have not wrote to my papa nor sister since I reached the first stage after I left them; I then wrote a long letter." I felt myself hurt, and could not help shewing it; I said as that was the case, I would instantly return home, and relieve the minds of her family, as far as knowing she had got safe to her journey's end would do it, as I could not bear to have such a father and sister made unhappy. The tears trickled down her cheeks, and, pressing her bosom with one hand, she assured me, in a plaintive voice, she would not for worlds make them so, but indeed she had entirely forgot that she ought to have written to

to them, but I should never have cause to rebuke her again so severely.

I now rose to take my leave, after requesting the honour of seeing the Countess in Cavendish Square, and entreating her to indulge me with the company of my friend as often as she could part with her. She expressed herself infinitely flattered by my requests, and assured me of an early visit. Matilda, whose sorrow was entirely vanished, told me, smiling, not to fear, for I should have enough of her company, as she should see me every day. Her ladyship apologized for the unpolished manner of her young rustic, and added, she trusted I would see her a different creature. I replied, I hoped not, as I did not see room for embellishment, and I was of opinion, that the polishing of a gem, though it might add to its lustre, too often lessened its intrinsic value. She returned, she thought as I did; and, provided

provided the gem were to be locked up in a miser's chest, she should deem the hand of the artist useless ; if, on the contrary, it was meant to raise the admiration of the beholders, she conceived its roughness would not be any recommendation ; and, pardon me, madam, (curtsying very low) if I presume to doubt that what you have advanced are your sentiments, as you are yourself a striking proof of the exquisite polish a real gem will take without its value being diminished : and Mrs. Paulet must give me leave to hope, I may be equally successful with Miss Howard, and that the language of truth will not be less pleasing because spoken with elegance.

I felt myself abashed, (and curtsying as low as her ladyship had done) told her I felt myself very unequal to combat with her on a point in which the world allowed her to excel, perfect good breeding. Then turning to Matilda, I assured her
the

the best proof she could give me, that refinement did not lessen her sincerity, would be fulfilling the promise she had made me.

So saying, I hurried to my carriage and drove home not much pleased with the situation in which your sister is placed. She is too volatile and too beautiful to be entrusted to the direction of one who will instruct her in every personal, but rather discourage every mental accomplishment; she will be surrounded with titled admirers, for none others will be suffered to approach her. I am not so illiberal, but to suppose that among the many there may be some worthy of her; may she place her regard on such a one: all will then be well, and the sooner such an event takes place, the less hazard the sweet girl will run of having her temper spoiled, her taste vitiated, and her morals corrupted. Forgive me, Emma, for presuming

suming to think or write thus of your aunt, and do not let it make you uneasy. Remember, it is but surmise, and the surmise of one who is but too apt to form prejudices at first sight, which she has sometimes discovered to have been without foundation. The interest I take in your sister's welfare, will make me a watchful observer of what passes in Portland Place, the result of which observations I shall, from time to time, communicate to you: in the mean time I would wish you to be silent to your father and brother as to what I have now said.

Adieu, my dearest Emma,

Believe me yours,

MARIA PAULET.

LETTER

LETTER III.

MISS M— HOWARD TO THE DEAN OF —

MY ever loved and honoured father and dearest sister, for you must make one letter serve you both, as I have but ten minutes to write it in, and I have stolen that from dressing, for my time has been so taken up in this wonderful place, that I have hardly sufficient to breathe ; this is the only excuse I can make for not having written sooner ; yet I believe I had better tell the truth, because I know my father loves it. What will you say, then, my dearest sir, when your Matilda tells you, she had forgot she had a father, a sister, or a brother ? Yes, my best papa, I had indeed ; this giddy brain of mine was so taken up with purchasing new clothes, fitting

fitting them on, seeing fights abroad, and company at home, that I have been deprived of the power of thinking, and I verily believe I should have gone on in that state, if Mrs. Paulet had not called upon me, and said she supposed I had written every day to you; at that moment my unkindness flashed upon my mind, and made me ashamed to confess how ungrateful I had been; but yet I did confess; and I saw she was shocked, and I am sure the reproof she gave me made me tremble, for she said I had made you and my sister unhappy; indeed I fear I have done so, and my heart is so severely pained at the thought, that I am sure it would break did I not know that you are both so good that you will forgive me; for I remember you always made allowances for my thoughtlessness, and I am afraid you will ever have occasion, for I cannot think seriously for five minutes together, if my life depended upon it. I
declare

declare to you I have several times tried ; and when I imagined I was thinking on one particular subject, I found twenty others had mingled themselves with it, and I could hardly tell which was the original ; but my time is almost out and I have hardly said one word of my present situation.

It was evening when we reached town, notwithstanding which, I was astonished at every step we went, the height of the houses, splendor of the shops, and crowd of people, and carriages, were all matter of wonder to your rusticated girl, who did nothing but utter foolish exclamations, with her head stuck out of the window, till our carriage stopped, and a gentleman, who had been waiting the arrival of the Countess, took my hand to lead me in : and now, my dear sir, I thought I had got into an enchanted castle, every thing was so superb ; I wish I could describe the
elegance

elegance of this palace, for such I must call it, but that would be endless, there are so many apartments, and every one is so magnificent. Were you and my Emma once here, you would never endure to think of the deanry again; indeed it now appears to me a terrible old place.

The next noon, for no people of fashion rise here before twelve, my aunt took me to a jeweller, and desired me to take what I liked; but had I done that I should have taken the whole, for I liked every thing. After purchasing a number of very valuable ornaments we returned home, and the house was crowded with visitors till four o'clock, when we retired to dress for dinner; accordingly, at six we dined; there were twelve strangers which the Countess called a small party; it seemed very odd to me to dine at the same hour I used to drink my tea; but use will soon familiarize me to every thing that

that now appears awkward; the Countess's friends did not leave us till a very late hour, when I was exceedingly glad to get to bed. The following morning was passed in visiting the various public exhibitions, till the time of dressing for dinner, after which the day was spent in much the same manner as the preceding one; this morning has been passed with mantua-makers and milliners, and so will this week to come, my aunt's generosity has been so great. But I must conclude, for her ladyship has sent to tell me she waits for me to attend her to the opera; therefore farewell, my dear papa, and sister; tell my beloved brother that I shall soon fulfill my promise of writing to him. I am called again; excuse this abrupt conclusion from your giddy but

Affectionate Daughter,

MATILDA HOWARD.

LETTER IV.

THE DEAN OF — TO MISS M — HOWARD.

MY Matilda judged well, when she thought truth would be more agreeable to her fond father than any excuse she could have invented, however plausible or flattering such excuse might have been; he loves his daughter, and his bosom heaves with transport at any proof of her affection; yet would he sooner forever forego those dear emotions, than but once have the pain to discover he had been indebted for them to falshood. No, my child, let nothing tempt you to deceive a parent whose indulgence shall always be extended to your unpremeditated errors; he knows the frailty of human nature; he looks not for perfections. He
found

found no difficulty in forgetting your want of thought, though he fears he could not have forgiven you had you endeavoured to conceal the failing by deception. Since my children were capable of knowing right from wrong, it has been the business of my nights to form plans for their instruction, and of my days to execute them: hitherto my labour has been crowned with all the success my anxious heart could ask; and, should my darlings fulfill the promise their youth has given me, I shall descend to my grave the happiest of fathers. While they live respected for their virtues, let their station in life be what it may, (for the meanest being has a part to act) great and certain will be the reward of those who perform it with honour. We are apt to give the epithet of wretch to a fellow creature which we behold oppressed by poverty, groaning under sickness, and his sorrows increased by the contempt of the world; yet the time will

will come when this humbled being, if he has supported his calamities with fortitude, and looked up to his God for relief; yes, the time will come when his wounds shall be healed, when neither pain nor poverty can afflict him; when the contempt of the world can no more be felt; when he that bruised shall say, "Come to me thou blessed of my Father, for thine is the kingdom of heaven."

I have been led, my Matilda, into this solemn subject by the style of your letter, in which, although I do not find any thing greatly to condemn, I find less to approve; the tenor of it bespeaks a heart charmed with dissipation. Beware, my child, ere it be too late! beware of its allurements! it is a fiend which steals imperceptibly on the mind, driving thence every other inhabitant; for where it is once admitted, its sway is unbounded; it corrodes the senses, and saps the foundation

tion of principle ; the heart becomes contaminated, and its possessor despicable. Avoid then, my child, so destructive a folly ! the pleasures it gives are unsatisfactory and fleeting ; its evils are certain and lasting. Do not make me repent a compliance I thought I had no right to withhold, lest the refusal should deprive you of an independence, the loss of which the bankrupt fortune of your family could never have recompensed ; yet do not mistake me when I press you to avoid dissipation. I do not mean to recommend the life of a recluse, or even the retired domestic one you followed when under my roof ; situated as you now are, I know it is impossible, as a compliance with your aunt's wishes and customs will be expected, and is, in a degree, incumbent on you to acquiesce in. I would only guard my child from following too implicitly a guide whose actions are not always dictated by prudence ; in saying

this, I would not wish to censure my noble relation ; her education and yours have widely differed ; she was born to rank and affluence ; given at the moment of her birth into the hands of venal strangers. Her parents being of too high fashion to attend to the welfare of their children, thought their duty performed by furnishing the most expensive hirelings to instruct them in those accomplishments which the custom of the times made necessary. Thus your aunt arrived to the state of woman without ever having been thwarted, or contradicted ; for who would be hardy enough to render themselves disagreeable to one who might hereafter be a benefactress, by correcting errors which they had no interest in removing. When she could no longer be considered as a child, she was taken from the hands of teachers, and introduced into the world by parents who anxiously attended to the outward graces and decorations of her person,

son, but had not leifure to promote the improvement of her mind. Her early acquaintance with diffipation, made it habitual to her; she followed it as a thing of courfe, nor thought it wrong, for she never had been taught to think further than that if she committed no heinous crime, forbidden by the law, she was not accountable to the world for her actions, and the other world she knows but little of; she goes to church fometimes, and obferves the ceremonies of it when there, becaufe it is the fafhion; she gives alms to the poor for the fame reason. Thus she paffes a life untainted by glaring vices, but equally divelted of real virtues: had she been differently educated, better fruits might have been expected; and, if I may prefume to fpeak my fentiments on fo awful a fubject, they are, that at the great tribunal she will not be required to render as ftrict an account of her paff life, as one whole infancy had been inftructed to look

beyond this world for their reward; one who had been taught the principles of their religion, and had been early made acquainted with the duties of a Christian.

These, my Matilda, I am proud to say were instilled into you from the first moment I perceived the dawn of reason: my children were born to no inheritance; for their mother, though she shared in the rank of her sister, partook not of her fortune; it has therefore been my endeavour to store their minds with such materials as would enable them to prefer honest indigence to dishonourable splendour. While I know they tread the path I have pointed out to them, I shall wait with patience for that time which is to rejoin me to their departed mother; should it be otherwise, and should I be doomed to meet the hour when the conduct of any one of them shall bring the blood into my long forsaken cheek, I shall

shall think I have lived a day too long, and every following sun will be beheld with reluctance. That my Matilda will never be the cause of wretchedness to her parent, but that she will still continue to delight his heart by her innocent cheerfulness, is the fond belief and anxious prayer of her

Most tenderly affectionate Father,

M. HOWARD.

LETTER V.

MISS HOWARD TO MRS. PAULET.

MY Maria's letter has filled me with inquietude; she seems to mean more than meets the ear; yet she would not withhold any intelligence it was necessary that her friends should know, and it would be right for her to be made acquainted with any danger that awaited her beloved sister. Is it my anxiety then which has given a meaning to words they never intended to convey? it must be so, and I will no longer entertain suspicions destructive to my own peace, and injurious to the honour and prudence of relations who I have every reason to respect and love.

My

My father has had a letter from the dear flighty Matilda ; it was not exactly such as he could have wished, yet her candid confession that she had forgot her duty until you reminded her of it, pleaded so forcibly with him, that he soon forgot she had not pleased him. He has, however, made her letter an excuse for writing her a very solemn answer, pointing out the danger of dissipation, and warning her to avoid it. I trust and believe it will have that effect, for her heart abounds with noble generous feelings, though the extreme vivacity of her temper hurries her at times into indiscretions. She, I am well assured, will never deliberately act wrong ; be it then your care, my friend, to remind her frequently of what she owes to herself, to her family, and to the opinion of the world. I demand this as a proof of your esteem and affection for your Emma ; as to what you say of her fixing her regard on a worthy object, I have no fears on that

head, as she has some time since bestowed her affections on a youth who promises to be an ornament to human nature ; it is two years since they exchanged their mutual affections, and at their separation they plighted their faith to each other. Were it the passion of a week, I should distrust Matilda's constancy ; but as it is, her volatile disposition gives me no alarm : besides, among all the gay circle which surround her, she will hardly meet an equal to the youth to whom she has given her vows. In this you will agree with me, when I tell you, that the accomplished William Lesley is the idol of her heart ; both their parents are strangers to the wishes of their children, as Mr. Lesley's knowledge of his father's unhappy temper makes it necessary he should remain ignorant of a circumstance he would probably use his authority to prevent the completion of. He is equally anxious to preserve the secret from her parent, as he

he knows the honest pride and rectitude of his heart would not suffer him to connive at any engagement, however advantageous to his daughter, that was likely to be disapproved by the family with which she was going to connect herself.

Thus situated, you will see the propriety of your taking no notice to Matilda of what I have written ; see her as often as you can ; she already esteems and admires you ; it is in your power to make her love you ; she will then entrust her most secret thoughts to your keeping, which will give you opportunities of correcting her too great flow of spirits. I need not urge my friend further on this subject ; I have had too many proofs of her regard to entertain a doubt of her doing every thing that can contribute to the happiness of her

EMMA HOWARD.

LETTER

LETTER VI.

WILLIAM LESLEY ESQ. TO SIR CHARLES
MACKENZIE.

My dear Sir Charles,

I THINK it is about a month since I wrote you a long letter in praise of the place of my present residence. Woodland was then a paradise of sweets ; I looked forward with dread to the time of my quitting it. My reason for now writing, is to desire you will direct your next to Oxford, as I go for thence to-morrow, yet does it seem an age I have to stay in this desert ; such it appears to me in my present temper of mind.

Matilda

Matilda Howard has left its vicinity, and with her fled every charm; the very atmosphere has changed; I no longer breathe as I was wont to do. I verily believe, was I to pass another fortnight as I have passed the last, it would be beyond the power of physic to save me. Were you ever in love, Sir Charles, and robbed of the society of your mistress? If you were, tell me how you bore it: did you hate every creature, and every thing? were you always changing your situation, yet always in the wrong place, unless it was a spot you had frequented with your goddess? and then, did you not melt into the weakness of a woman? did you not call to mind every word she had spoken, every look she had given, the most minute article of her dress? did you not sit whole hours in company without seeing or hearing, unless the name of your idol was mentioned? did not the sound make you start? and, if it came from the mouth of a female,

a female, did you not discover a thousand amiable qualities in her? if from a male, were you not instantly jealous, though he had only said her mother was dead, or her father was living, or she was born in such a year, or lived in such a place? when the sun shone, did you not complain of its glare? when it did not, did not you repine at its absence? did not light reading disgust, and grave weary you? In short, were you not a peevish master, a fullen companion, and a troublesome friend? If you were all these, and did a thousand other ridiculous things, you may form some idea of my present situation; and, in that case, may be able to prescribe to me. Yet it is impossible you could ever have felt what I feel, for you never beheld Miss Howard, and no other woman could inspire the passion she does; but she is gone, and heaven only knows when we are to meet; and she is gone to a place, Charles, I disapprove; to London; to worse,

worse, to her aunt's; to the Countess of N——. She will be surrounded by fops, fools, and flatterers; yet they cannot flatter her; she is beyond all praise, and fops and fools she will equally despise. What is it I fear then?

O, Mackenzie! my fears have taught me liberality; she will be adored, for all who see her must adore her; by the elegant, the accomplished, the well-bred man of the world; he will court her to partake his title and fortune, while I have nothing to offer her but a heart overflowing with love, and the promise of uncertain expectations, which I know not when or if ever they may be realized. How can I then conceive it possible! what folly is it leads me to hope she will be blind to the graces of art and nature, deaf to the pleadings of ambition and wealth, and regardless of the entreaties of her friends? They will surely be against me; but I
must

must fly from these thoughts, for upon my soul, Charles, the bare idea of the possibility of my losing her, deprives me of reason; but as I am incapable of writing on any other subject, I will, at this time, relieve you from a repetition of my groundless fears; I am determined they shall be groundless, and tell you, my dear Sir Charles, I am, as far as I can judge of myself, your faithful friend,

W. LESLEY.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

WILLIAM LESLEY, ESQ. TO SIR CHARLES
MACKENZIE.

I HAVE been in London for these ten days, during which time I have seen my Matilda but twice, though I have called every day at the Countess of N——'s door. The morning after my arrival in town, I hastened to her ladyship's house; on enquiring for Miss Howard, I was shewn into a room where there was no one but my charmer and her music-master; at sight of me she sprung forward to receive me with a degree of transport that at once banished from my mind every unpleasant idea which had hitherto intruded itself; and I clasped her to my bosom in an ecstasy of joy; her instructor perceiving,

perceiving that a third person might be disagreeable, civilly took his leave. But we had scarcely congratulated ourselves on his departure, when word was brought to Matilda, that her aunt desired her music-master would excuse her staying any longer this morning, as she had particular occasion for her company, and was then waiting her attendance, as the carriage was at the door.

Miss Howard proposed my going with her to the Countess ; but this I objected to, as her ladyship's message seemed to indicate something of haste : she then desired I would return in the evening, when she would make me known to her aunt, as the particular friend of her brother ; for though I had been frequently at the deanry during her visit there, and was present at her taking leave, she had not honoured me with the notice she had done every other person, by desiring to see them at Portland

land-Place. I was not in a situation to stand on ceremony, therefore promised to comply. Accordingly, at eight o'clock, I went, and was ushered into a drawing room, where sat the Countess, with Matilda, and several male and female visitors.

On my entrance, Miss Howard led me up to her ladyship, and introduced me as a friend of her brother, and one she must recollect having known at her father's house: she received me with great politeness, but with somewhat of coldness. After the customary civilities had passed on each side, she left me, and taking the arm of a gentleman who I afterwards learned was Lord Vernon; she walked to the other end of the room, and entered into conversation, of which it was easy to perceive, by the glances they cast at me, I was the subject. At length they joined the company, and the conversation became general; it turned on foreign customs,

toms, on some of which I ventured to give my opinion, when Lord Vernon, turning to me, said, "How long since you returned from your travels, sir?" I told him I had never been abroad; he seemed much surprised, and exclaimed, "Never abroad!" I answered, "Never, my Lord; I never was out of England." "I am astonished, upon my honour," returned his lordship, in an affected manner. "Why then, sir, you have never seen the Gallery at Naples, Saint Peter's at Rome, Mount Vesuvius, or the Pyramids of Egypt?" "Never, my Lord; is there any thing so wonderful in that?" "Upon my soul," replied the peer, "I think so." "Will your lordship tell me in what the wonder lies?" "Faith, sir, I thought that every man of rank and fashion travelled." "I am neither; does the wonder now cease, my Lord?" "O, certainly, most undoubtedly!" pulling up his neckcloth; "Why then, my Lord, I assure

I assure you I am neither." "I beg your pardon, sir, for my mistake, but I thought the Countess——"

Here he paused, and took snuff, and her ladyship, eager to exclude herself from any share in my visit, interposed, saying, "No, my lord, this gentleman never has travelled; he is a country neighbour of Miss Howard's." His lordship bowed, and again begged my pardon; I was hurt to the quick, but commanding myself, I coolly replied, "there was not the least occasion for an apology, as his lordship had mistaken me for a character I was confident he admired, and that, were I inclined to be vain, I should be led to believe something in my person and address bespoke the man of the world; but, as vanity was not among my foibles, I rather imputed the mistake to his lordship's want of discernment." Here I bowed, and the entrance of more company prevented

vented the peer from retorting, which I conjecture he would have done with some severity, as he seemed a good deal deranged.

The guests were now disposed of at the different card tables ; I declined playing, in the hope of having an opportunity of conversing with Matilda, while the rest were engaged ; but, to my infinite mortification, I heard the Countess desire her to fill her place at such a table, as she felt not disposed to play. Miss Howard obeyed with too little appearance of reluctance ; I followed, and placed myself over against her, anxiously fixing my eyes on her face ; her's were so intent upon the cards, that she saw nothing else ; or, if chance directed them to meet mine, there was such a vacancy and want of feeling in them, that I turned away disgusted. The only comfort I had, arose from observing that she was equally inattentive to all the ogles,
sighs,

sighs, and soft whispers which were directed to her by a crowd of coxcombs, among whom Lord Vernon rendered himself conspicuous for his tenderness and attention. Weary of my situation, I would have withdrawn, had not a dread of leaving her so beset, detained me: I leaned over a chair, musing what I should do, when my reserve was interrupted by a voice near me, saying, in rather a raised tone, "Heavens! he is more than mortal! he is a perfect divinity!"

I turned to see what new visitant deserved these appellations, and from whence they came, when, to my infinite confusion, I discovered that myself was the person to whom they were applied, and that the beautiful Lady Bridget C—, was the panegyrist; her eyes were still fixed upon me, and she had addressed herself to the lady of the house. Feeling myself out of countenance, I changed my

place, and was soon after followed by the two ladies, when the Countess, who had not deigned to notice me since my refusing to play, asked me if I still held my resolution of not engaging at cards? I replied, if my playing could be dispensed with, I should rather it would; but if her ladyship wanted one, I was at her command. She said I was very obliging, and could not think of making me do what I disliked. Then, turning to her companion, Lady Bridget, she said, "As you do not play, nor this gentleman, you are the fittest company for each other: I have a great mind to leave you together, and I will, myself, take one of the places you were expected to fill."

Without waiting a reply, she presented us to each other; I stammered out something about the honour she did me, but Lady Bridget, more composed, said, she should congratulate herself upon her having
ing

ing declined cards, as it had introduced her to the acquaintance of so accomplished a gentleman as the Countess had informed her I was. I told the Countess, I was much indebted to her for her commendation, but I fancied she had forgot that I was only a country neighbour of Miss Howard's: I continued addressing Lady Bridget: "Your ladyship must not pay implicit credence to the Countess of N——'s panegyrics on her guests, as they arise from the uncommon degree of good breeding she possesses, which leads her to exalt them in each others opinion, as well as in their own; it is this which makes her house the resort of humble merit."

Lady Bridget cast her eyes round the room, as if in search of the people I had mentioned, but appeared unable to guess who I could mean: the Countess coloured excessively, and, seeing a party breaking

up, she hurried to them, and placed herself at the table, leaving me to entertain one who was an entire stranger to me. Had not the lady possessed greater talents for improving an acquaintance than her companion did, we should have remained strangers till doomsday; for, after in vain racking my brain for something to say to her, I gave it up, and was looking with anxiety round me, in the hope that something might offer, which would afford me an excuse for quitting her. I conclude she saw my embarrassment, for, in the gentlest voice possible, she asked me if I did not think the present mode of excluding pictures from drawing-rooms was a proof of our degenerated taste? I replied, "most certainly," in a vacant tone and manner, for I hardly knew what she had said, or what I had answered. She went on:

"From

“ From the fervency of that expression, I am convinced you are an admirer of the art of painting.” She then proceeded to express her own excessive fondness for, and expatiated on it, in a style that at once gave proof of the correctness of her taste, and elegance of her language. You, Charles, who know my enthusiasm with regard to painting, will not wonder that I was charmed; all my timidity vanished; and I discovered a knowledge of the science, I hardly, till that moment, knew I possessed.

So taken up was I with my subject, that I did not, for a time, perceive we had attracted the attention of a great part of the company to our conversation; among which was Lord Vernon, and Miss Howard: a look of anger from the latter, soon put an end to my eloquence; I was of a sudden struck dumb, and must have appeared to my auditors as an impudent,
D 3 ignorant

ignorant impostor, who, having stolen the observations of another, had got them by rote, and having run through my lesson, was compelled to be silent. A contemptuous sneer from Lord Vernon now added to my confusion; my good-natured companion alone sought to release me from it, though her opinion must have been to my disadvantage, as she, as well as the rest of the company were ignorant of the real cause.

Turning the conversation, with infinite address, to the leisure a country life afforded to pursue the study of painting, she said, "You mentioned something to the Countess, of your having been in the country; were you any time there?" "I replied, great part of my life:" "You must not let that be known," added she, "or our people of fashion, who wish to see their sons accomplished gentlemen and men of sense, will certainly send them thither

thither in future, in preference to foreign countries, from whence they almost always return, apes, and coxcombs." A number of this description at this moment pressing about her, to return thanks for the compliment she had paid them, I left her, and flew to Matilda, begging to know how I had offended her, when, with a look of contempt, she told me, I had better stay with Lady Bridget, as we seemed pleased with each other; and, for her part, she had not at present leisure or inclination to attend to me; with this she turned away. Had you ever loved as I do, Charles, you would pity me; I was absolutely—Mackenzie, do not laugh! but I was absolutely in terror lest I should faint on the floor. To prevent so unmanly a catastrophe, I hurried to a seat where I was some time before I recovered myself; when I did, the first object which met my view, was Miss Howard, seated in a retired part of the

D 4

room.

room, listening, with the utmost attention, to Lord Vernon, whose discourse appeared, from his lordship's earnestness, to be of a serious nature. My pride was wounded ; I felt ashamed of the figure I made : rising, I went and made my bow to the Countess, who curtsied very low, but did not speak. I then addressed Lady Bridget, (who sat near Miss Howard), I told her ladyship what was farthest from the truth ; that the moment had arrived, when I was compelled to regret I had had the honour of being introduced to her ladyship, as I was come to take my leave. She said, she should feel equal regret with myself, and with far greater reason, if she could suppose, that the evening which began, was to end our acquaintance : but she had no such idea, as she hoped for the honour of shortly shewing me her Lord's collection of pictures, which, she flattered herself I would not find

find unworthy the observation of even so excellent a critic.

I bowed, and passing by Matilda, without appearing to see her, had reached the door, when Lady Bridget stepping after me, and repeating my name, I returned to meet her; it was to desire my address: I gave her ladyship a card. At this moment I met the eyes of Matilda Howard; they were suffused in tears; I was on the point, Charles, of running and throwing myself at her feet, to implore her forgiveness, had not prudence been kinder to me than is her custom, by stepping in and bidding me instantly depart. I obeyed the command, and, hurrying out of the house, returned to my lodgings, after having passed the most unpleasant evening of my life.

I immediately wrote a letter to Miss Howard, expressing my concern for the

involuntary offence I had given, and entreating pardon; I concluded with assuring her of my unalterable attachment: this I sent early the next morning. I have since wrote again, and called every day, but to no purpose, I cannot gain admittance, nor has she deigned to answer my letters: I know not what to think; indeed I am incapable, of thinking rationally; I have passed my time in driving from one public place to another, in the hope of seeing her; but all in vain; she either does not go into public, or I do not stay long enough in any place to meet her; for I am no sooner in one place, and find that she is not there, than I am haunted with the idea that I shall miss her by staying a moment where I am, I then hurry away to another, where I am equally restless; and so go on till I have gone through every fashionable house of public dissipation with which this town abounds. I then return home dejected, disappointed,
and

and weary; I have spent the last eight days of my life in this manner, without variation; and, by heaven, Mackenzie, I would not live it over again for worlds, nay, I could not; such another week would fit me for the hospital of incurables.

I will, to-morrow, set out for Oxford; I shall be less unhappy when at a distance from the residence of the unkind possessor of my heart; she cannot love me; yet she must, she shall, she does. The jealous pang she felt on Lady Bridget's account; the tear which my neglect had brought into her eye, and which, at that moment pierced my soul, are now my cordial drops. Yes, Mackenzie, she loves me; but surely she has too severely punished my first, my unintentional offence. I will leave London; perhaps when she knows I am gone, she will relent, and seal my pardon with her hand, for I am

D 6

resolved,

resolved, prudential motives shall no longer deter me from soliciting it. I feel that penury with her, would be preferable to a kingdom without her. I will no longer trifle with my happiness. Adieu, Charles, I will set out for Oxford tomorrow; write to me there; give me counsel; I will follow it if I can.

Adieu,

WILLIAM LESLEY.

LETTER VIII.

MRS. PAULET TO MISS HOWARD.

I WOULD have long since written to my Emma, had I known what to have said to her respecting her sister; and I would now have declined writing at all, did I not fear my silence might alarm her. The day following the visit I informed you I had made Matilda, she returned it; the Countess did me the same honour; their stay was short. At their departure, I pressed your sister to give me as many of her hours as possible, when the Countess gave me to understand Miss Howard's time was so taken up with her several masters, that she had scarcely sufficient to fulfill her indispensable engagements; but that she, and she did not doubt her
niece,

niece, would be always happy, when I would honour them with my company at Portland Place. I was a good deal hurt: I told her ladyship, I had flattered myself Miss Howard would have deemed her school-fellow, and the friend of her sister, one to whom her engagements were indispensable; that I believed her family thought so, and would be astonished to hear the contrary. She replied, whenever she could steal half an hour, she would bring my young friend to see me, but I must excuse her from suffering her to come alone, as she never permitted her to visit out of her company: she added, she must own she was a little selfish in this particular, as by this, she not only enjoyed more of Miss Howard's time, but had a hope of seeing Mrs. Paulet frequently her guest.

Here the hypocrite curtsied to the ground, and they were taking their leave;

I slightly

I slightly returned the compliment; and, taking the hand of Matilda, pressed it between both mine, telling her, though I perceived I was no longer to look on her but as an acquaintance, she must forgive me if I still remembered she was the Dean of ——'s beloved daughter, and sister to my dearest friend; and in those characters took an anxious care in her future happiness and conduct. I would have proceeded, but my heart was too full to suffer me: she was affected, and, raising my hand to her lips, she kissed it with emotion. They then withdrew, never more, I am convinced, to renew their visit. Her ladyship, I suppose, thinks I might be a spy upon her actions, and, as such, wishes to keep me at a distance. I have, since this visit, written twice to your sister, in the hope of drawing her into a correspondence; her answers have been merely complimentary, and ending with an apology for the shortness

ness of them, pleading numberless engagements as her excuse.

I took the opportunity of Mr. Lesley's having called on me on his arrival in town, to wait on Matilda ; I enquired for Miss Howard only, as you may suppose, but was shewn into a room where the Countess was alone. I begged her pardon, and said it was Miss Howard I wished to see ; she begged me to be seated, and she should wait on me immediately : then, stepping to the door of an adjoining room, she called to your sister, who instantly appeared, attended by a Lord Vernon.

Matilda coloured on seeing me, and seemed much embarrassed ; I told her I had heard from the deanry ; that her friends complained much of not hearing from her. The Countess, addressing her niece, said, " My dear, you ought to be amazingly obliged to Mrs. Paulet for
acting

acting as your monitor ; few would be so assiduous as she is to discover, and remind you of your neglect of duty ; I hope you receive her reproofs as you ought." I replied with warmth, " If she did, she would see them as they really were ; as acts of friendship, dictated by a heart filled with anxiety for her peace, and that of her respectable family ; but I believed she did not receive them as they were intended, for I feared her judgment had been perverted ; to what end, her ladyship, who had been the instrument, could best decide."

Without waiting an answer, I asked your sister if she had any commands to the deanry? she had sat silent and confused, but now faltered out, " her humble duty and affectionate love to all there." I then enquired where Mr. Lesley lived, and when he went out of town? she replied, " she did not know either." The
Countess

Countess desired to be informed, if I considered Miss Howard's not being able to direct me to the lodgings of all the young men of the town, as another mark of a perverted mind? if I did, she was willing I should likewise impute that to her direction. I told her, without waiting for her permission, I should have done so, as I had too high an opinion of Miss Howard's principles, to suppose she could, without being misguided, be ignorant or indifferent to any thing which related to Mr. Lesley.

You must forgive me, Emma, for betraying your confidence, but I thought it necessary to remind Matilda of her solemn engagement, which I believe she had, to that moment forgot. She, however, I have reason to think, from the effect my words produced upon her, now felt all its force: for, rising in extreme agitation from her seat, she withdrew, pale and trembling,

trembling, to a window, where she gave vent to a flood of tears. Lord Vernon followed her; on his approach, she put him back with her hand, saying, "Leave me, my Lord, nor persecute me more; Maria is right."

The Countess bit her lip, and the peer stood confounded; I took a very uncere-
monious leave, enjoying the confusion I had occasioned. Were your sister of a different temper than she is, I should hope for some permanent good from my reminding her of her plighted faith; but as she is, I have no hope; there is no stability in her; no foundation to ground any thing on; she has a heart susceptible of the most poignant feelings, but a moment passes, and the remembrance of her sorrow, and the cause of it, are vanished: she has a heart to feel, a tear to pity, and a hand to relieve the distresses of her fellow creature; she would suffer any inconvenience

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venience

venience herself to oblige another, but it must be done at the instant; for, leave it to any future period, and she thinks no more of it.

This is the judgment I have formed of your sister's character, and with pain I have formed it, for I think it a most dangerous one, and one that will plunge her into numerous difficulties, though possessing a bosom untainted by one vicious thought; the lightness and volatility of her disposition, joined to her gentleness, will render her an easy prey to the designing hypocrite.

I am convinced she loves Mr. Lesley, and that, were he suffered to be with her, which he cannot while she continues in her present situation, she would never deviate from her first attachment; but at present, I tremble for the youth, whose future happiness depends on her constancy:

stancy : nor has the account, a visitant has this morning brought me, assisted to lull my fears.

Your sister and the Countess left town several days since, accompanied by Lord Vernon : it seems they are to spend some time at a seat of his, (no great proof this of your aunt's delicacy) as his lordship's character hardly warrants a young lady, destitute of a male protector, remaining any time under his roof. To be plain ; I think your father should be immediately made acquainted with her engagement to Mr. Lesley ; he will then see the inutility and impropriety of her remaining with the Countess of N——, who will give her ideas beyond Mr. Lesley's fortune, without giving her any thing to support them, as she will not think herself bound to provide for one who has disposed of herself without consulting her. Consider this well, my dear Emma, and then

then follow what your judgment dictates;
and, whatever the result of your deliberations may be, they shall have my ardent prayers for a successful conclusion, for I am, with the most unalterable friendship,

Yours,

MARIA PAULET.

LETTER IX.

SIR CHARLES MACKENZIE TO WILLIAM
LESLEY, ESQ.

DID not I know that my friend possesses a mind equal to cope with disappointments, I should fear for the effect my present intelligence might have on you; and even convinced as I am of your superior sense, and of the contempt you must feel for the worthless being whose perfidy is the subject of this letter. I still find a reluctance to acquaint you with it, and were it possible you could remain any time ignorant of the baseness of one who possessed, but deserved not your esteem, I should have been silent; but

But it is not possible. I shall, therefore, without ceremony, inform you, that Matilda Howard was yesterday married to Lord Vernon; deeply as she had ingrafted herself in your heart, I know it will cost you a pang to drive it thence; yet a moment's consideration will shew you how unworthy she is of the smallest place in your regard. Your pride alone would be sufficient, had you no other motive for forgetting her. Has she not sacrificed you at the shrine of avarice and ambition? has she not been bribed to sell her person to a Lord, while her heart refused to accompany the bauble? Yes, she has; I saw her, Lesley; for I was, by accident, present at the profaned ceremony; she trembled and turned pale, and pronounced the promise to love. I saw her give a reluctant hand, and wear a dejected and guilty countenance, till the title of ladyship, joined with congratulations, sounded in her ear: this had power in an instant

instant to dispel the gloom; her coroneted coach drawing up to the door, completed her cure, and rivalled you in her affections.

Can you retain one tender sentiment for so weak, so mean a creature? Impossible; it cannot be: you cannot love what you do not respect, and she has forfeited every claim she ever had upon your esteem. Upon my honour, Lesley, so much do I despise her, that you would be lessened in my opinion were I to know that you regretted her loss; a loss it is not, nor will it prove one; you will now complete your studies, and make the use of them they were intended for, by making them the means of displaying abilities which I foresaw would have lain dormant had this boyish engagement taken place. I shall now hope to see you unshackled by attachment to any thing

but the opinion of the world, unless it is to him, who, from his infancy has been, and to his latest hour will continue to be,

Your sincere and affectionate Friend,

CHARLES MACKENZIE.

LETTER

LETTER X.

WILLIAM LESLEY, ESQ. TO SIR CHARLES
MACKENZIE.

THE contempt of my friend is then to be added to my other calamities: "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions;" be it so: my bosom is bared to receive them; the hope of my life is lost, therefore fate I defy you. Yes, Mackenzie, I have forfeited your good opinion, nor can I ever regain it, as Matilda, the perjured Matilda, still enslaves, and will enslave, this bleeding heart, whilst it has power to feel. You say I will now return to my studies: Oh, no, Charles, "Othello's occupation's gone;" I am lost to myself and the world; the vigor of my mind is fled; I have no capacity

capacity for any thing but wretchedness; in that I am an adept.

Cruel, ungenerous Matilda! but did you not say she gave a reluctant hand, and that her heart refused to accompany her person? Do I then possess that inestimable treasure, and has the villain lord no share in it? This knowledge will comfort me; my revenge will at least be gratified; she will loath his embraces, and shrink from his detested arms. He will be wretched: alas! where does that thought lead me! must not she be wretched too! Heaven forbid! no, Matilda, I could not enjoy a blessing at the expence of your peace! it would no longer be a blessing if it cost you a sigh; that sigh would turn it to a curse; then give your heart, where you have given your person, to Lord —

By

By heaven, Charles, I cannot finish the sentence. No, never will I consent, that he who has robbed me of my dearest right, should be rewarded with happiness greater than a good man could deserve. No, she may withdraw her affections from me, but I cannot endure the thought that he possessed them: may he feel the weight of the misery he has inflicted; the insupportable curse of disappointed love. Oh, my friend, could you know how I doated on the ingrate; could you know to what a vast extent I loved her, you would pity me, and forgive the sorrow I feel at resigning her to another. Had she died, my respect for her memory, and the recollection of her truth, would have softened my despair; I should have looked forward to the time when we should again meet; but now I have nothing to console me; no future expectation to allay the pains of absence, for even in another world I cannot claim her—she is another's,—

that thought distracts me ; I must forget her, or lose myself. I will return to London ; the gloom of a college suits not with the present temper of my mind ; I will fly from it, and try what hurry and noise will do ; if its effects are salutary, you shall hear from me again ; if not, I conclude you will not wish. Be that as it may, I shall ever remain, with most unfeigned regard,

Your Friend,

WILLIAM LESLEY.

LETTER XI.

LADY VERNON TO MISS HOWARD.

HOW shall I tell my Emma the deed have done, and what will she say when she is informed of it! she will not credit what I write; she will say it is impossible. Matilda Howard cannot have married Lord Vernon, her heart has long been Lesley's; she has sworn her hand to be his, and has called heaven to witness and record her vow, that she will never be another's. True, my sister; I well remember the solemn oath; but it is too late; I could also repent, but repentance will avail little. I am the wife of Lord Vernon; an hour has not passed since I returned from the altar; yet, in that little space I have shed more tears than my

own reflections have drawn from me in my whole life before. You will expect me to account to you for this change in my sentiments respecting Mr. Lesley, and for the secrecy and haste with which this marriage has been conducted.

To the first I can only say, the change has arisen in me from his unkind and improper conduct. He passed an evening at my aunt's, on his first coming to town, when he became acquainted with Lady Bridget C——, to whom he instantly attached himself, and has, from that moment, thought no more of me, as was visible from his behaviour; for, on leaving the room that night, after having complimented her ladyship in the most particular manner, he passed by me without the common civilities good breeding required; nor has he once since called, or even sent to make the most trifling enquiry concerning me; but, I am informed, has de-
dicated

icated the whole of his time to attending on his new acquaintance.

This ungenerous and insulting treatment made me listen to my aunt's persuasions in favour of Lord Vernon; and, on the moment she had drawn a half consent, indeed, my Emma, it was but half consent from me, I was hurried to church, and married without thinking what I was doing; poor thoughtless creature that I am! I know not when I should have recollected myself, had I not, in the midst of the ceremony, met the eye of William's friend, Mr. Mackenzie, who I once before had seen, and now recollected he had never but then seen me; yet I am sure he knew me, from the look of indignation and contempt he darted at me, which, in an instant, reminded me of the wrong I was doing his friend. I believe I should have called to the clergyman to stop, had not a chill faintness come over and stupi-

fied my senses, from which I was awakened by the congratulations of those who attended. I now saw all was over, and therefore put on the best appearance I was able.

As soon as I had reached home, I excused myself on account of informing you, my Emma, what I had done : the Countess has undertaken to excuse me to my father, for having given myself away without first obtaining his approbation : he is all goodness, and will pardon me. You, too, my gentle sister, will overlook my fault ; but what will Lesley say ? will he forgive me ? yet why do I ask this ? he thinks not of me ; perhaps, at this moment, he has forgot there is such a being. Oh, my Emma, what have I done ? but it is too, too late ; I must not think, I must study to forget every thing ; myself, and what is dearer than myself, the ungrateful Lesley ; and, in their stead,
I will

I will cherish the remembrance of the beloved inhabitants of that roof, under whose cover I have passed, I fear, the happiest of my days.

Adieu, my sweet Sister, pray for your

MATILDA, (I must add)

VERNON.

LETTER XII.

THE COUNTESS OF N— TO THE DEAN
OF ———
—————

My dear Dean,

AT the desire of your daughter, I have taken up the pen to intercede for pardon of a shocking offence she has committed this morning; but indeed her crime is of such a nature, that I almost despair of success. What do you think the unfortunate girl has done? Nay, it is in vain to puzzle; were you to think all the years you have to live, you would not guess, as such a thought has never, nor ever could have entered into your head; but take the
dreadful

dreadful history. The little witch found some way or other to steal the heart and senses of a peer of the realm, possessed of the trifling fortune of thirty thousand pounds a year; and she had the imprudence to make hay while the sun shone, by taking advantage of his weak moment, to prevail upon him to take her for better for worse; which he did this morning, in the parish church of ———. To do her justice, she had some scruples on the occasion, and would have waited papa's consent; but I was apprehensive his lordship might recover his reason, and then papa's consent would come too late, and then papa would say, I was as great a simpleton as his daughter; so I told her we would get that afterwards, which would do just as well.

My arguments at length prevailed, and I took Miss Howard, a girl without a shilling fortune, in my carriage to church;
from

from whence by the magic of a few nonsensical words, she returned home in her own, with the title of Lady Vernon, the rank of a peeress, and a fortune of thirty thousand pounds a year. What a catastrophe! do you think you can forgive her? you must indeed, poor papa; I have promised her you shall; but she has serious fears of your anger. My Lord Vernon and myself have laughed heartily at her folly; which, after all, I must think feigned; indeed I believe she is the veriest little counterfeit in the kingdom.

Present my best regards to Mr. and Miss Howard, and believe me, with congratulations on this fortunate event in your family,

Your very sincere Friend,

And humble Servant,

N—.

LETTER

LETTER XIII.

THE COUNTESS OF N— TO LADY BELL
EASTWOOD.

NOW that my affairs are settled beyond the power of fate to disturb them, I will satisfy your curiosity respecting my late unaccountable conduct, as you term it ; unaccountable it must have appeared to you, and all who have any knowledge of my real character, that I should quit Paris, and immure myself, for the immense space of ten days, in a miserable old cloister, with a man of God, and his progeny ; not content with this, that I should remove one of this holy family to London with me. Yes, you must have been amazed ; I was sensible what cause I had given for astonishment, and I felt a kind
of

of compassion for you, but it was not strong enough to get the better of my prudence, which whispered to me, not to trouble my friends with my secrets, unless their assistance was necessary; for, says she, what end can it answer? besides, it is not polite to burthen your friends, to keep that for you, which can be of no use to them, and which may be stole from them in spite of their best intentions. And how can you expect your friend, who is uninterested, to be more cautious than you are yourself, who, having every thing at stake, could not be silent? Thus spoke her sage ladyship, the sapience of whose counsel I approved and followed, till, as I before observed, the pursuing a different conduct would not affect me. I shall therefore proceed to account to you for my apparent extraordinary proceedings; but to do this, it is necessary that I should go back to the early part of my life.

When

When my father, the Earl of D—— died, he left three orphans, (our mother being before dead), a brother, a sister, and myself entirely dependent on his eldest son, who inherited his title, and with it the whole of his fortune. We were the only part of his legacy he would have wished to have been freed from, but that was impossible; he for the present, therefore, wisely determined to divest his house of every thing which could induce us to remain in it, thinking distress was the best spur to industry. The end proved that he had judged well; for my brother's spirit could not brook the indignities he received. He therefore took an early opportunity of telling the Earl, that he was an unnatural scoundrel, a coward, and a wretch he would have trodden under his feet, had he not been the son of his father.

After

After having finished this gentle rebuke, he left his house, or rather his prison, and embarked for the East Indies, to the infinite satisfaction of his noble brother, who was now released from one of his dead weights, which was the epithet he gave us. He now exerted his tyranny upon my sister and myself; she, poor soul, was not of a temper to contend, and the grave would have soon provided for her, had not his lordship's chaplain seen and administered consolation to her sorrows by eloping with her to Scotland, where they were joined in wedlock, in which state they lived very happy, notwithstanding her brother renounced her, and persecuted him to the utmost of his power; but the young man had friends who (although opposed by his lordship) had interest to obtain him preferment in the church; I hardly need add he is the present Dean of —.

I was

I was now the only dead weight remaining, and about me the Earl gave himself little trouble; he never saw me unless by accident; and it was one of those meetings which brought me into notice; for his lordship having one day surprised me in an arbour with a young gentleman of the neighbourhood, whose father was reckoned a proud, choleric, troublesome man; and, as those were a kind of people his lordship did not choose to offend, he thought the less noise was made about the matter the better: he therefore removed me to the house of an aunt's, at some distance. Here I was introduced into company, and attracted the attention of several men of fashion, who proposed for me to my brother; among them was the Earl of N——, who, offering to take me without a fortune, was listened to, notwithstanding his age trebled mine; my brother, apprehending some opposition might arise on the part of Sigismar, which

was

was the name of the young man he had seen with me, and who had then made him acquainted with his honourable wishes of making me his wife, thought it best to remove him. For this purpose, he obtained a genteel situation under the Spanish ambassador, who was then recalled from his embassy. Sigismar accepted the appointment, in the hope he should be enabled by it, to obtain my brother's consent, or protect me without it, should he refuse.

We parted with protestations of eternal fidelity, and I was, three weeks after, married to the old Earl, with whom I lived ten years, to our mutual misery; he at length took it into his head that it would be more for his honour to separate. He accordingly informed me of his intentions, and, giving me a sum of money, with directions to his steward to pay me the same annually, desired me to quit his house,

house, which I was not long doing ; for though I had not been hitherto backward in indulging myself, my heart panted for greater liberty, which I was determined to enjoy in another country. I therefore lost no time, but going immediately to Dover, I crossed over to France, and and from thence I travelled into Spain. Shall I confess my motive for this, was the hope of meeting Sigismar, to whom I was still attached, notwithstanding I had sacrificed him at the shrine of ambition. I was disappointed in my search, for the object of it had quitted Spain, nor had he left any clue by which he could be traced.

My errand having proved abortive, I was about returning to England, had I not been prevented by the unexpected meeting with my brother, who had just arrived from the East Indies, where he had accumulated a vast fortune ; I told him a
pitiable

pitiable story of the cruelty with which I had been treated by my husband ; which completed the aversion he had before entertained for titles and nobility, in which I affected to join him : affected I say, for I really did, and do consider a title a pretty appendage ; it enables a woman to take a thousand liberties which are looked upon as bagatelles, or proofs of her ladyship's spirit ; when if Miss or Mistress were to indulge in the same latitude, woe be to them ; they would have all the female cats in christendom clawing at them ; nor would the males spare them, for there are male cats ; but, my dear, they are of a less violent nature ; they only shake their heads, and shrug their shoulders, not because they are less malevolent in their intentions, than their sister cats, but that they have more art. How have I seen myself envied by your undignified gentlewomen, who wished to do exactly as I did, but dared not, because they knew the world

world would not be restrained by their consequence from wagging its tongue against them.

But to return to my brother, who was a peevish whimsical mortal, without one quality to recommend him to a fine lady, except a fine fortune, and this to me was every thing. I therefore studied his temper, and soon found the road to his affections, which gave me free access to his treasure; a circumstance very apropos at this time, as my beloved spouse did not survive our separation more than three years, and at his death left me nothing more than my jointure, which amounted to the miserable pittance of six hundred pounds a year. This did not affect me, as I was now in the lap of fortune; yet without being happy; for to insure permanence to my prosperity, I was obliged to dedicate myself to the ways of the humourist, and they were not ways of pleasantness,

pleasantness, till at length he, in a happy hour, chose the path of peace, by quitting a world he was not formed to enjoy.

On opening his Will, I found he had left the whole of his large fortune (as his life had been guided by whim) to his niece, Matilda Howard, his eldest sister's second daughter, (only reserving a few thousands for legacies) but with a proviso that she married a commoner, who should take the name of Harley, which was the name of a friend he had acquired in India, and from whose bounty he had derived the greater part of the wealth he possessed; but, in default of these terms being complied with, the whole of his property devolved to me. I did not let this Will distress me much, for I believed, as it was witnessed by two foreign domestics, who had left Spain, and had gone I knew not whither, that it remained with myself to dispose of it as I thought proper: I there-
fore

fore contented myself with committing it to the flames.

I now gave loose to my genius, as you can testify; for, at this period, our intimacy commenced, and, for the space of seven years, I lived the only life I am capable of enjoying, that of splendid dissipation; I was courted, envied, hated, flattered; the world thought me the happiest of beings, and, had it not been for one secret grief, it had thought right—yes, my dear Lady Bell, you have been deceived; I am only happy when surrounded by objects that take me from myself. Retired to my closet, I am a wretch; the prey of anxiety and uncertainty.

Oh, Sigismar, well have you repaid the wrong I did you! But what am I about? what has this to do with my present subject? I will then go back: but I have

lost the thread of my story by this foolish digression. I will therefore lay down my pen, and resume it at another season: till when, my dear lady, believe me

Your's sincerely,

N—

LETTER XIV.

THE COUNTESS N— TO LADY BELL, IN
CONTINUATION.

I Had now been seven years in quiet possession of my fortune, I had actually forgot there had ever been a will that might have deprived me of it; I however was not suffered to remain in this security, for on desiring a sum of money from my steward, (the same who had served my brother) he had the presumption to remonstrate at my expences, for which insolence I severely reprimanded him; the Gentleman was offended, and without the least ceremony told me that I was already largely in his debt, and he would not advance me any more till that was discharged; for, he continued, “should

the Dean of ——'s daughter entitle herself to her uncle's fortune, by complying with the conditions of his Will, where am I to look for my money? I fancy your ladyship, who run in debt when possessed of twenty thousand pounds a year, will hardly pay those debts when reduced to an income of six hundred."

Had the wretch's words been flashes of lightning, they could not more effectually have silenced me; at length recollecting myself, I said, are you mad? what do you mean? what will do you speak of, and in whose possession is it? he coolly replied, in mine: "I mean the will your brother made before his death; the copy of which you found among his papers, and thought proper to suppress, and informed your credulous brother-in-law, that my old master had rewarded you for your great attention to him, by making you his sole heir." I found I was too much

much in the power of this man to contend; I therefore allowed what he had advanced, and added some excuse: I forgot what, for my conduct, with which he appeared satisfied, and we separated for the present, but not till I had obtained from him an assurance that the secret of the will never had been disclosed to any person; and from this motive, that the sentimental wretch conceived it might be the means of sacrificing his master's heir to one who wedded her fortune; one who might render her unhappy, and the honoured name he took with her contemptible: whereas, in her present situation, who ever made her his wife would marry her for herself; and by so doing give strong proof of his affection and generosity of temper, which ensured felicity to her, and gave a promise that the name of Harley would still continue to be revered.

You may be assured, that after this fine speech, I did not attempt corrupting the sanctified

sanctified speaker: indeed, I saw something in his face that told me it would be in vain; but I likewise saw something which gave me hope he might be overcome by art. I therefore highly approved of what he had said, and condescended to request he would still defer making the affair known; in the mean time I would endeavour to arrange my finances, and prepare myself to meet the blow. The fool was softened by my seeming humility and promised what I asked; but at the same time urged my speedily reconciling myself; as he was informed, a youth who would do honour to the name of Harley was attached to the Dean's daughter.

On our next meeting I affected to consult him on the best means of settling my affairs; among the rest I informed him of a considerable sum of money which I had lent to a person of consequence in Italy, and wished I had some person whose expedition

pedition and honesty I could rely on to go there and recover it. The idiot instantly offered his services, this was what I aimed at; you will conceive I was not long in furnishing him with his credentials, and at the hour he left Spain for Italy I left it for England; determined to lose no time, lest he should return from his fools errand before my scheme was finished; though I had not much reason to expect him very shortly, as I had taken care not to be certain what part of Italy my air-drawn friend was in; and had likewise represented him as a person in cog, lest he should marvel at a person of his consequence not being known: I furnished the sentimental blockhead with all the papers requisite to prove the debt; which as they were of my own writing, I had taken care to make full and formal as possible.

On my arrival in England, I posted with all expedition to the deanry, where I was
received

received with all the respect, and treated as rich relations always are, with all possible homage. Oh, my dear Lady Bell, you would have pitied me had you seen the situation. I have really, I think, earned the fortune I have secured by what I underwent during these ten days, for every day was a year ; but I was resolved to accommodate myself to the humours, be they what they might, of the preacher and his flock. It was well I had so made up my mind, for nothing else could have enabled me to persevere, their customs were so excessively *outré*. Why, my dear, we assembled, servants and all, every morning at eight o'clock, in a frightful, gloomy old chapel, where they said their prayers for at least half an hour, and then adjourned to breakfast, which they seemed to eat the heartier for the exercise they had had. Their ceremony took a different effect upon me ; for though I was only a looker on, it totally destroyed my
appetite,

appetite, to create which I was compelled to drive about the country, praising prospects that I never looked at, till the hour of three, when we sat down to dinner, after the Dean had, with great solemnity, begged God to bless our meat. I know not what effect this might have with the rest of the family, but, for my own part, I did not find my viands to digest better than before I was used to that ceremony.

The cloth was scarcely removed, and the priest had petitioned we might be made thankful for the good things we had partaken of, before we were summoned to the drawing room, to receive visitors, which my considerate host had invited for my amusement ; they did amuse me ; they were such formal old souls you would have died with laughing, had you seen me, in the midst of them, asking one how many little cherubs she had ? another, how the charming little boy I had seen, did ? then complimenting a third on the

beauty of the great healthy Miss she had with her, or on the gentility of the ill bred heir; nor were the males neglected: I praised the horse of one; the garden of another; the house of a third; the wife of a fourth: and, after they were gone, spoke in rapture of them all to my believing brother-in-law, who was delighted at the happiness I enjoyed in his retirement, which I fancy he began to think I would be sorry to quit: and, good soul, willing to dispel my uneasiness, took an opportunity of mentioning something he was to astonish me with some months hence. I protest the very word months made me tremble, though I had command enough over myself to conceal my emotion, and to feign a rapture at the idea, though I was at that moment determined that a few hours should fix the day of my departure; for I had been long enough there to see that the smallest delay would be dangerous.

I soon

I soon discovered the youth who would do honour to the name of Harley, his attachment, as well as the lady's, being perfectly visible; her's I could not wonder at; for his uncommon beauty of person, elegance of manner, superior accomplishments, and fine sense, made me tremble for my fortune. I never saw him but I felt the most unaccountable uneasiness: I was ever on the point of calling him Harley. In any other situation, I could have worshipped and adored this youth; but now my fears wrought so upon me, that I was agitated and unhappy in his company.

I, according to my intention, as soon as I returned home, pretended to have received an indispensable summons to repair to town immediately, and added a most earnest petition to be favoured with the company of Matilda Howard, who, I promised, from that moment to adopt. This

was granted by the fond father, and we left his house loaded with blessings ; I hastened to London with my charge : I had seen that in her disposition which led me to believe, she might be moulded, when separated from her family, to any form I thought proper.

For the first twenty miles we went, she did nothing but weep for those she had parted from ; I at length, with much gravity, proposed returning with her, saying, I should not have taken the trouble I had, could I have thought it would have been disagreeable to her ; that my wish was to make her happy, and I was grieved to find my well-meant endeavours had so contrary an effect : my love for her had made me officious : but I thanked heaven it was not too late to rectify my mistake. Her gratitude was alarmed ; she implored my pardon, and entreated me to pursue my journey ; nor did I see another tear,
or

or hear any further expressions of regret: she was, long before we reached town, perfectly chearful, and seemed to have forgot she had a friend in the world that was not with her.

As we travelled, I took an opportunity of mentioning Lesley; I said I was fearful her sister and him were attached to each other; yet I hoped she had more pride, as I should be sorry a niece of mine should throw herself away. The poor thing seemed astonished; and, in a faltering voice, asked if I did not think Mr. Lesley very handsome? I carelessly replied, yes, I thought him a good looking young man enough, and I supposed he was reckoned a fine gentleman, in her neighbourhood? She said he was. I added, if he was wise, which I had not seen much proof of, he would never quit it, as the moment he did, he would see he had been beholden to ignorance for his superiority.

She

She looked amazed, but was silent, and I turned the subject. You will perceive my end was to lessen him in her opinion if I could, or at least to make her ashamed to communicate her favourable sentiments of him to me.

On our arrival in Portland Place, I was lavish of my money and indulgence; the first was given to be able to attract the attention of the world by the splendour of her appearance, and the latter, to give her a taste for high life and dissipation, and to give me an interest with her, in all which I was successful. Her beauty thus adorned, attracted numberless admirers; the love of pleasure took possession of her very soul, and she looked up to me with adoration, as the author of her happiness.

My business was to get her a titled husband, and of this I never lost sight; among those who fluttered round her, I
marked

marked Lord Vernon as my prey ; not for any good qualities, for those were out of the question ; but I knew him to be vain, rash, and unthinking ; his vanity, I concluded, would prompt him to monopolize the object of universal admiration. His unthinking disposition would make him an easy dupe of any artifices I might find it necessary to use ; and his rashness would prevent delay, which was my grand object.

Here again I was successful ; and I had reason to applaud myself for my penetration. His lordship was, of all men, the fittest for my purpose ; for, on the first idea of a rival, he proposed marriage. This formidable rival was no other than Lesley, who soon followed his divinity to town, and, presenting himself at my door, was admitted to her. His coming to my house was unexpected, as I had on all occasions, treated him with
studied

studied neglect. I no sooner heard they were together, than I separated them, without appearing to have intended it. Miss Howard, on coming to me, informed me of the visitor she had had, and also that he was to return in the evening. I expressed some surprize at his having taken the trouble of calling at my house, and added, coldly, that I should be glad to see him in the evening as her acquaintance.

Before the hour of meeting, I gave Lord Vernon the history of the affair, with such additions as I thought proper: I had given him to understand, by way of encouraging him, that it was a mere country gentlemen he had to cope with; What then was his astonishment, when he saw enter the room, a creature who might justly be termed "the glass of fashion, and the mould of form!" My heart died within me at the sight of him; his
lordship

lordship was utterly deranged. After a little conversation with me, he however rallied, and made several very unsuccessful attempts to shew his superiority.

Among my visitants that evening was Lady C——, whose turn for gallantry is well known: she no sooner made her appearance, than the thought occurred to me of bringing her and Lesley together, which I accordingly did: she instantly sat him down as her slave, though all the advances were from herself; for Lesley possesses the usual attendant on uncommon merit—great diffidence. Besides this, I saw he would most willingly have dispensed with her ladyship's civilities; which, finding he could not escape from otherways, he took his leave; but had staid long enough to fill the heart of poor Matilda with the flame of jealousy, which I took care should not expire for the want of fresh fuel. To this end, I forbid his
being

being admitted when he called, nor suffered her to be informed he had done so, but even affected to wonder at his neglect; his letters I served as I had done her uncle's Will; besides, I caused reports, I had myself circulated, respecting his attachment to Lady C——, to be brought her; and, as I feigned an indisposition which confined me to the house, she had no opportunity of meeting him, or detecting the various impositions.

During this time, Lord Vernon hardly left her a moment, and my affairs seemed in a most prosperous way, when they were shaken by the mal-apropos visit of a Mrs. Paulet, the bosom friend of the elder Miss Howard. I discovered, on this lady's first appearance at my house, it would not be for my interest to suffer Matilda to cultivate her acquaintance: I therefore took an early opportunity of politely affronting her; notwithstanding which, she
intruded

intruded herself upon me when I was off my guard, and, by her questions and reproofs, awakened ideas in my ward that had lain dormant for some time, and which I found very difficult to lull to sleep again. To prevent future interruptions, I left town with her, and repaired to the seat of Lord Vernon, accompanied by his lordship, where I had every thing prepared to seize the first yielding minute, which presented itself a few mornings since, when I had the happiness to get rid of my niece, and my fears together.

I staid but a few hours with the new married couple, but left them to enjoy the pleasures of love and retirement unmolested, notwithstanding the most pressing entreaties of Lady Vernon to the contrary: she, poor soul, had begun to repent her part of the bargain before the ceremony was finished; but it is now past recovery, and she had better make the best

best of it. I have made her a great lady, but I am not interested whether or not she is a happy one.

I have written to the sentimental gentleman, my steward, informing him of the extinction of the honoured name of Harley, and likewise reminding him of his unparailelled insolence to me, for which, and his being a fool, I acquainted him he was discharged my service.

Now do you not think I have managed my cards in a masterly manner? Perhaps you will say the idiots I had to deal with, played into my hand; yet I had to practice much shuffling, nor was the cutting without its share of art. I have the vanity to think, had not my adversaries assisted with their misdealing, I was equal to have played the whole game alone; you recollect that I had both whist and hazard to attend to; you will not wonder then
that

that I now change my game to brag; though at the same time I must acknowledge I am much indebted to lottery, for the preservation of my fortune. I give you leave to amuse our coterie with these my exploits, for which I expect to be rewarded by their granting me a diploma.

When I shall again join your society, I am not able to say; London at present possesses novelty which diverts my thoughts from dwelling on objects that destroys my peace. This will fill you with conjectures, but they will be vain; for you must remain in doubt and uncertainty; nor can you complain; for she, the unhappy she who writes this, has long been a prey to them, and too probably may long remain on the rack of suspense, till another world shall remove the veil. Another world! what know I of it! nothing. Then, why do I speak of that of which I am uninformed?

informed? do I look forward to that hour with chearful expectation? No, no: miserable as I am, I prefer living here, where I know the worst, to venturing on a world unknown. But I must quit this theme; for, were I to give way to this gloom, you would hear that I had made my Will, and given the fortune I have taken so much pains to secure to myself, between Lady Vernon and young Lesley; settled my jointure on the Magdalen Hospital; and gone a pilgrimage to Rome on my knees, by way of penance. Therefore adieu; I fly to my only medicine—dissipation.

Adieu, Adieu,

N—.

LETTER

LETTER XV.

THE DEAN OF — TO THE COUNTESS
OF N—.

YOUR ladyship will perhaps be surprised when I inform you, I am neither pleased with your letter, nor with the event which you term a fortunate one in my family ; while I say this, I most willingly acknowledge, Lord Vernon, in point of rank and fortune, far exceeds any expectation I have ever formed for my children ; their happiness has been my only pursuit. If my Matilda has, by this hasty step, secured her's, I shall indeed deem it a fortunate event,

Your ladyship is perfectly right in supposing I could never have guessed at the
offence

offence my daughter had committed, in the years I have to live, (which are probably few ;) that their number may not be lessened, nor their tranquility broken by this rash and undutiful conduct, is my fervent petition to the dispenser of good and evil.

To Lord Vernon's character I am a stranger ; if he is a good man, I shall pay him that respect which he will never command from me by being only a great one : I have lived long in the world, and, I bless my God, I have never worshipped the golden calf: to virtue in rags I can bend with the humblest submission, and rise dignified in my own opinion : to vice, though adorned with a crown, I should think myself degraded were I to bow.

After having said this, your ladyship will not conceive I am so much elated with the honour his lordship has conferred
on

on me, as to be blind to the improper manner in which it has been done ; for, highly as he may think of himself, his consequence would not have been lessened, but encreased, by having obtained the consent of a parent to the nuptials of his child. But it is probable his lordship had not time given him for so necessary a form ; for your ladyship tells me, my daughter took advantage of his weak moment.

Indelicate, ill-fated Matilda ! if this scandal is just, you are an object of contempt, and you deserve it, for you are indeed a counterfeit ; and Lord Vernon is entitled to compassion, for he has made an unhappy choice. The woman who could stoop to take advantage of a momentary fondness, must be mean and unprincipled. And can my Matilda, she who has been educated in the school of virtue, she who has been taught to abhor

VOL. I. G deceit ;

deceit; could she, whose virgin fame was spotless, descend so low? Thief like, to take advantage of the unguarded; to possess herself of that, which, being possessed of by fraud, will prove a bane to the owner; and, in the stead of aggrandizing, will bring her to dishonour.

No, my child, my innocent child, I will not think it possible you could so degrade yourself! your blood! blood as noble as that which flows in the veins of him you have given yourself to. Your aunt has wronged you, or rather let me suppose she meant no wrong; but being overjoyed at your unexpected fortune, her gladness led her to express herself with a degree of levity but too prevalent in the fashionable world. Yes, my dear Matilda, this was the case, was it not? tell me it was, and relieve, and at the same time, forgive the fears of an old man, whose pride and affection are ever on the watch, and
ready

ready to take alarm when the honour of his children is concerned.

That your ladyship is deeply interested in their welfare I am fully convinced; for which, and the kindness you have shewn to my beloved, but imprudent Matilda, I shall ever remain your debtor; but you will receive your reward from him who is all-sufficient, and who never fails to repay, with an overheaped measure, the benefits conferred on his servants. Yet, such retribution as I have to give, I know you will not despise; take, then, my blessing and my prayers, that after you have fulfilled the will of your Creator in this world, you may enjoy eternal felicity in that to come.

MELVIL HOWARD.

LETTER XVI.

MISS HOWARD TO LADY VERNON.

I SHOULD earlier have acknowledged my sister's letter, had not its astonishing contents deprived me of the power ; and, indeed, I am not yet sufficiently recovered from my amazement, to write with any degree of reason. I feel like one just awakened from a frightful dream, unable to believe it true, yet unable to decide on its falshood. I tell myself a thousand times a day you cannot be married to Lord Vernon ; that you have imposed the tale on me to divert your idle disposition : but my father will not let me enjoy this opinion ; he reads over to me a letter he has received from your aunt, confirming what you have told me : and must I then
admit

admit it to be true? Oh, Matilda, I fear, I fear I must! and I will henceforward distrust the whole world; I will put no confidence in my own heart, for you, on whom I had a great reliance, have deceived me: have you not deceived yourself; or have you been deceived by others? Alas, my sister, it is now too late to enquire! nor would I now have you to seek from whence the deception arose; you are the wife of Lord Vernon; his honour and happiness must now be the grand objects of your pursuit; if he is possessed of your affection, you will find your felicity in his; and your endeavours to please him, will give pleasure to yourself. Should this not be the case, should you, in your marriage with him, have preferred your worldly interest to the feelings of your heart, still are you bound to dedicate your life to his tranquillity; for, has he not sacrificed grandeur of alliance, and increase of fortune, to his attachment

to you ? Yes, he has ; and you are called upon, by every sacred tie, to reward him for his disinterested love ; he is entitled to all your thoughts ; he is the rightful master of your most secret wishes ; to him you are to look for protection, and for every worldly blessing. From him you must derive happiness, or you cannot be happy ; your interests are inseparable ; his honour and his peace are in your keeping ; your own depends upon their safety. Weigh well the immense value of the sacred deposit, and let your daily prayers ascend to the Ruler of hearts, to enable you to preserve them free from blemish.

Be not offended, my Matilda, my sister, my friend, that I have ventured to remind you of your duty, which seems to imply a want of confidence in you ; of the rectitude of your intention I entertain no doubt, my fears arise from my knowledge

ledge of your unthinking and unsteady disposition, and from a suspicion which your letter to me has instilled, that Lord Vernon is not the object of your regard. I pray to heaven I may be mistaken, and that uninterrupted happiness may attend your hasty union. May your future days be marked with honour and felicity.

Your offended, but forgiving parent, bids me say, you have his blessing; and that he will petition the Almighty, that neither you nor the husband you have bound yourself to, may repent. He likewise commands me to recommend to you the earnest cultivation of Mrs. Paulet's friendship; the gaining of which, he says, will be one great assurance to him that you are not unworthy the vast affection he bears you.

Your brother will give this into your hand; it is the first pleasure I ever envied

my dear George, the loss of whose company I shall now doubly feel, now that I am deprived of my Matilda's ; but it is for both your good ; why should I then repine ? No, I do not ; or if I did, I will henceforward bury every selfish thought, and draw my own happiness from that of my dear connections, among which my sister, my ever loved Matilda, stands, I had almost said, foremost. Blessings, blessings attend you, and may the pomp of the world never make you regardless of the unalterable affection of your

EMMA HOWARD.

LETTER

LETTER XVII.

WILLIAM LESLEY ESQ. TO THE HONOUR-
ABLE CHARLES MACKENZIE..

I THINK I concluded my last whining epistle with a promise of letting you hear from me if I found myself grow wiser, and not else ; you will therefore conclude that I am ashamed of my past folly, and you will conclude right, for I am perfectly so.

My removing to London, Charles, was a providential step ; for, had I remained immured in the confines of a college, I had now been a fit inhabitant for bedlam ; instead of which I am what you once knew me. Oh Lord, no—that's nonsense ! you

would not now know me, I am so altered. Why, my dear fellow, I am a buck—no, not a buck—faith I hardly know what I am: but I will tell you how I live, and leave you to decide upon my proper title.

I rise at noon; dress; make visits (if not engaged to attend some females of fashion) till near the hour of dinner; when I again dress, and partake of that meal at some house of distinction; to many of which, through the introduction of Lord C——, I have the honour of being admitted; here parties are formed for spending the evening, by going to public places; and the rest is spent at cards and supper, most commonly at the same house where I dine. I then repair to my lodgings, and go to bed, much about the same time I used to rise when at Woodland. But then I was a fool—a love-sick fool—I am cured,—look here Charles—all my fond love thus do I blow to air:—'tis gone! and with it
all

all Matilda's power; I can now write that name with a steady hand. If at any time I find her intruding upon my thoughts, I drown her in Burgundy; though I sometimes nearly drown myself before I can wash her away.

I have not seen her yet, as she and her peer are enjoying the sweets of retirement in the country; they have my consent; I envy not the lady her lord, nor the lord his lady; notwithstanding, I wish they would come to town, if it was only to shew her ladyship how little her perfidy has affected me. I often think how I shall behave, Charles, when I first meet her; I sometimes determine not to appear to know her; at others, I think I will accost her with the familiarity of an old and indifferent acquaintance; the latter, I think, will be my plan.

I met with my good friend, the Countess of N——, some evenings since ; it was at Lord C——'s; the sight of her brought to my recollection, the not very civil treatment I had met from her, at her house ; which, with some suspicions I entertained of her having influenced her ward to marry Lord Vernon, determined me to take no notice of her. After a little time, she approached me, saying, " Mr. Lesley, I hope you are well ?" I bowed carelessly, and replied, " perfectly so, my lady ;" and would have passed her by, but she continued :

" You have not been long returned to town, I suppose ?" I answered yes, some time ; she said she was sorry to hear me confess that, but she must suppose, as that was the case, I had thought she was still in the country, as I had not honoured her by calling at her door ; to which she hoped in future I should be no stranger,

as

as she would be always happy to see me at Portland Place. Her easy impudence confounded me ; I however thanked her for her invitation, which I was concerned would not be in my power to accept, as I had a number of friends who claimed all my attention ; but if, at any time, an idle hour did occur, I would undoubtedly comply with her ladyship's request.

I waited no reply, but entered into conversation with the person next her ; this was not the only attempt I made to mortify her ; for, on the card parties breaking up, a select few remained to supper ; among which her ladyship was one, when some of the gentlemen, conversing round a card table, made use of these words : " We will make a match." I immediately walked up to the Countess, and asked, if I should conduct her to those gentlemen ? she answered no. I begged I might : she wished to know for what purpose ?

purpose? I replied "they were going to make a match; that knowing her ladyship's fondness for that employment, I judged she would be unhappy if she was not suffered to labour in her vocation." She smiled in my face; and, with the utmost appearance of good humour said, "No, no, I'll have nothing to do with making matches; I have greater success, as well as pleasure, in marring them, Mr. Lesley!"

All the ruin she had brought upon me, rushed to my mind, at the sound of her last words; I was lost in thought, till my antagonist, pursuing her triumph, said, "Nay, good sir, do not be alarmed; I shall never interfere between you and your mistress; should even the sister of Lady Vernon be the idol you worship."

The sneer that these words were accompanied with, stung me to the quick: I thanked her, in an ironical tone, for her merciful

merciful intentions towards me, but said, I had much doubt of her ladyship's humanity being strong enough to get the better of habit; beside some other trifling reason which would operate with me to prevent her, and the object of my affection, ever having any knowledge of each other; therefore she need fear no attempt from me to gain her niece, for whom, I hoped, she would be equally diligent in providing a proper partner, as she had been for Lady Vernon: she laughing replied, "No, no, Mr. Lesley, I have nothing to do with Miss Howard; I only prevented Matilda from falling into improper hands; but I am not so much interested in the fate of her sister. I shall therefore leave her to follow her own inclination.

We were now summoned to supper, but I was too much deranged by this foolish conversation to partake of it; I therefore stole away, and returned home, meditating on
what

what had passed ; nor can I yet forget it ; for, the more I reflect on the Countess's words, the more I suspect some artifice has been practised on the unguarded temper of my adored Matilda.

You, Charles, thought she gave an unwilling hand ; perhaps, at the moment I cursed her inconstancy, and accused her of having sacrificed me, she was, herself, a sacrifice, and now deploras the falsehood and loss of him, who would have abandoned every other blessing, to have preserved her to himself. The thought distracts me ! I must and will be ascertained of the justice of my suspicions ; should they be confirmed, I will have vengeance. On the diabolical Countess I cannot vent my rage ; but Lord Vernon must have been her accomplice, and he shall, as far as taking his unworthy life can do it, repay the wrong he has done her whose peace I prize far above my own, or I will
part

part with mine, and, by so doing, convince her of my unaltered affection.

But do I not rave ! What artifice could have been practised ? I can think of none which could have induced me to marry any other woman ! No : by that God who made me, the whole world conspired, could not have prevailed with me, to unite myself to the fairest, and most exalted being its space contained. Why, then, should she be wrought upon in the course of a few days, to give me up unquestioned, and unheard ? Oh, Mackenzie, it is plain she never loved me. Why, do I, then, think of her ? I will forget her ! this is the last time she shall wring my heart. Oh, my friend, I am unmanned ! my paper is blotted by my tears ; but this is the last time : yes, yes, Charles, this is the last disgraceful testimony of her unbounded power.

I shall

I shall remain some time longer in town: whenever I quit it, I shall bear with me, a heart deeply impressed by a sense of the uncommon attention shewn me by Lord C—— and his lovely wife: not only to them for their own unceasing kindness am I indebted, but for the numberless civilities I have received from others. His lordship is an amiable young man, of a gentle, quiet disposition, attached to the study of painting, to a fault; as it makes him inattentive to his lady, who is fond of gaiety and pleasure. On a slight acquaintance, you would think her a trifling coquet; but a more intimate knowledge convinces you you have wronged her; for, beneath the follies which fashion have made her assume, it is easy to discover a heart fraught with the most delicate sentiments, and adorned with exquisite feeling and sensibility: the reverse of this character she affects, and I have seen her laugh at a tale of distress, while

while the tear, bursting from her eye, proclaimed her an hypocrite. She possesses a masculine understanding from nature, which she has improved by studying the best authors; and, by the force of an uncommon memory, she makes every thing she reads her own. These acquisitions are not without their disadvantages; for they have led her into a contempt for her own sex, which she is not backward in shewing; nor is this her only failing, if a fondness for the admiration of our's can be termed one; as I believe she derives her chief happiness from seeing herself the object of attention. Yet, let me do her the justice to say, I have never seen her court the adoration of a fool; and, indeed, her motive for encouraging it from men of sense, if fairly weighed, would be found to originate in disappointment and pride; arising from the total indifference, if not neglect, of her husband, whose ideas are so entirely

tirely engrossed by Raphael, Bartolozzi, Corregio, and the rest of their profession, that he has not a thought to bestow upon his wife ; she knows herself worthy of different treatment, and, of course, mortification and disappointment must be the consequence, from which she seeks refuge in the pride of having her power acknowledged by the discerning and approved part of mankind. The desire of gratifying this pride, often hurries her to commit small improprieties, which an envious world does not fail to magnify, and it gives the term of gallantry to the slightest intimacy she can form with our sex ; this she is sensible of, but takes no care to avoid ; for, conscious of the rectitude of her heart, she despises calumny ; nor do I believe she would forego the acquaintance of one agreeable man to preserve her reputation from a thousand wounds ; she ever speaks of, and to her husband, with the most perfect respect, but
nothing

nothing further. If she feels any affection for him, she cautiously conceals it; but in this part of her conduct I am afraid she is no hypocrite: nor can I wonder at it, for though Lord C—— is a sensible, amiable man, and a scholar, he is not calculated to make any woman happy, and least of all her ladyship. Their dispositions are directly opposite: she is gay—he is grave; she loves company and cards; doats on music, and is qualified for conversation; he detests the three first; and, as to the latter, he will speak but on one subject, that of painting; and of this she is become weary: nor are these the only points on which they disagree, for her ladyship is most exactly nice in her person, which is ever decorated with the utmost taste, propriety, and neatness, whilst his lordship is neglectful of his, almost to indecency.

Such is the couple with whom I have spent far the greater part of my time,
though

though that is saying too much, as I see but very little of his lordship, who spends his hours (as I have remarked most gentlemen do, that are famous for either poetry, painting, or music) in company with their inferiors, and too often with people devoid of principle, depraved morals, vulgar manners, and barren understandings; incapable of any trait of genius, save in the single science they profess. Yet, though Lord C—— fails in his attention to his lady, in one respect, he endeavours to atone for it in others; for he courts company to his house in the hope of pleasing her; all he asks in return is, that he may not be called upon to assist in entertaining them. This, in my opinion, is the most faulty part of his character; for he, by it, exposes a woman, possessed of every generous and tender feeling, to the gaze and adulation of the most accomplished and attractive men, to whose admiration it is scarcely to be supposed

posed she, or any other woman, situated as she is, could remain insensible.

But I have run this letter to an unconscionable length ; I will, therefore, in mercy to you, conclude without adding more than that I am,

Most truly, your's,

WILLIAM LESLEY.

LETTER XVIII.

THE HONOURABLE CHARLES MACKENZIE
TO WILLIAM LESLEY, ESQ.

My dear and valued Friend,

YOUR letter, which I received this day, I have attentively read. A few hours before I only feared for your happiness; I now tremble for your honour, as well as your peace of mind. The picture you have drawn of Lady Bridget C——, has filled me with the most anxious alarm. Beware, my William! I warn you to beware of the danger to which you are exposed! Fly from the amiable, the elegant, the neglected wife of your friend; for
such

such you have painted her, in contradiction to the general opinion: all indeed agree in allowing her the praise that beauty, sense, and taste deserves; but you are the first who have held her up as an object of pity and veneration. Were I not well assured of your penetration, and the opportunities your intimacy hath given of forming a just judgment, I should conclude that you, rather than the world, had been mistaken in her character; but knowing you, as I do, I do not hesitate to pronounce her an injured woman; and from thence arises my fears for your safety. Whilst I believed her the unprincipled, giddy, unfeeling coquet report described her, I felt no uneasiness at the great partiality I was some time since informed she entertained for you, as I knew my friend was too discerning to be seduced by the snares of an artful hypocrite, and I rejoiced to think your attention was engaged by an object which would divert it from

its present cares, without a hazard of involving you in future regret. That this is no longer my opinion, you are already acquainted; and, I give you my most earnest advice, to fly from temptation, as the only means of avoiding it. And, believe me, William, I give you the advice I would, myself, in your situation follow, or if I did not, be undone; for I presume not to think I could stay and withstand it.

The graces Lady C——'s enemies unwillingly, but universally allow her, joined to the virtues you describe her to possess, must render her too charming to be resisted, particularly by a man who has reason to believe himself not indifferent to her, and who has a soul capable of seeing and admiring her perfections: such a man must be flattered by the preference she has honoured him with; his heart must be penetrated with gratitude; humanity will dictate to him to return her
attentions,

attentions, and what must follow this mutual solicitude to please? it is out of nature to suppose any thing less than a mutual affection. And you, Lesley, are yourself an instance of the irresistible power love has over the whole man, when it once possesses the heart.

Would you not, to have obtained Matilda Howard, forfeited every other prospect in life? Yes, you would have bartered your just expectation of fame; fortune, and even the affection of an indulgent father; and for what? for the single gratification of possessing the woman you loved, though you were sensible you embraced her and ruin at the same moment. Will not this recollection forcibly point out to you, the folly of exposing yourself a second time to the dominion of a passion which threatens you with destruction? nothing less can follow the too probable consequences of an attachment

to Lady C——! Only reflect that you are the friend, the obliged friend of her husband, and, in that character, are bound to protect (were there necessity) the honour of his wife, and cautiously to avoid every possibility of sullyng it; which, I do assure you, you have already done, as the world talks loudly of your intimacy: that it slanders you at present, I am certain; but, I acknowledge, I tremble for the future.

^{ac}
Vanity is not among your foibles, Lesley; yet, you must know, you exceed most men in your interior qualifications; and I think I should not say too much, were I to add, all men in your exterior graces. Can it then be wondered at, that an elegant, and feeling minded woman, finding herself bound for life to a man whose taste and pursuits differ so widely from her own, and whose neglect has rendered her regardless of his affection;

can

can it be wondered at, if exposed as she is, to the constant attention of one so every way the reverse of him she has reason to dislike, if she draws comparisons which must end in the smothering every spark of affection that might have remained in her disappointed bosom towards her lord? No; the wonder would be if she did otherwise; nor is it possible she should: nature, that gave her sense, would have ill performed its part, had it left her either blind to the imperfections of her husband, or the merit of others; the affection for the one once subdued, she flies to the company and conversation of him who is more agreeable to her; in his presence she is happy; from him she is miserable. She asks not her heart what she intends, but, giving it the reins, never calls it to account till it is too late; she finds herself degraded by the man she preferred to all the world; she dreads his contempt, for she feels the respect she

once bore herself much diminished ; she grows jealous of his very look, and upbraids him with the misery he has brought upon her.

Thus do their guilty hours pass in fear and disquiet, till detection, which almost ever follows such an intercourse, consigns her to infamy, and her seducer to either the personal, or legal vengeance of an injured husband, and to the disapprobation and regret of his own heart, which must ever present to him the ruin in which he has involved a fellow creature, who, but for him, had been a stranger to disgrace. Mark me, William, I am now speaking of such a mind as I know you possess ; for I am sensible, the present day would furnish too many who would glory in their baseness, and assist in exposing the ill-fated, credulous woman, whom they had taken such pains to render unworthy : but, with such unmanly villains I will not
stain

stain my paper: my friend's soul is not in unison with such despicable wretches; his errors would be on the side of compassion. I write to save him from the pangs of sensibility, and not to deter him from treachery.

I yesterday received a letter from your father; he seems uneasy at your staying so long in town, and wishes to hear of your return to Oxford: he says, he thinks your studies would be less likely to meet interruption there, and he grudges every moment which is not, at this time, applied to your improvement. Alas, William, he little thinks your whole hours are spent in the manner he would most disapprove! in a manner that can neither tend to your honour or advantage! This I may fairly say, when you yourself confess you know not what character or title would serve to distinguish your present

mode of life, (unless the term of buck), which raises my indignation when applied to one, who, a short time since would have spurned at the depreciating epithet, yet now calmly gives it to himself. For heaven's sake, Lesley, stay no longer in a place which could give birth to so humiliating an idea! Return to Oxford: come to me—I will meet you at Oxford, or any other place except London—there I dare not venture: the effect it has had upon you will deter me from hazarding a similar alteration: therefore tell me where I shall join you, and let the day be an early one, for I anxiously desire to see you removed to a place where you will drink less wine, sleep at night, and spend the day rationally: but, above all, I wish to see you removed from Lady Bridget C——'s company. You used to say you could do much to oblige your friend; you have it now in your power to do so, by giving
him

him your company, and by believing
what he has written proceeds from the
affection he bears you; for he is, with
sincerity of heart,

Your anxious Friend,

CHARLES MACKENZIE.

LETTER XIX.

WILLIAM LESLEY, ESQ. TO THE HONOUR-
ABLE CHARLES MACKENZIE.

WHY, my dear Charles, what a methodistical letter hast thou written thy poor friend ! thou verily thinkest him no better than one of the wicked ! thou hast lived so long with thy maiden aunts that thy ideas are become corrupted—quit them, Mac !—fly from them ; there is more danger in thy remaining with them one week longer, than in my intimacy with Lady Bridget C——, could it continue for ages ! They will make thee as antiquated, and as abominable in thy ideas as they are themselves ; for must not those ideas be abominable, which are
ever

ever filled with base suspicions? undoubtedly they must. Thou mayst say what thou wilt, Charles, but I am sure of it; and I will give thee scripture to prove I am right: "out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh;" that is, where the heart is conscious of its own iniquitous propensities, it is led to suppose all others like it: and thy aunts remembering what they would have done in the days of their youth, had opportunity offered, have croaked to their nephew of the weakness of virtue, and the strength of temptation, till they have made him as credulous as their ancient selves. I dare say thou wast thankful for the excuse I gave thee to shew how thou hadst profited by their tuition. Now be honest—didst thou not read to them the lecture on morality thou didst send to me? and were they not in divine ecstasies upon the occasion? Oh, how I should have enjoyed seeing their lustre-lacking eyes turned up

to the ceiling, as much as to say, see, Mr. Whitfield, what a disciple we have added to thy flock ! he will, after having ran his course below, be exalted to a place next to thee above. Then, after giving each other looks of astonishment and congratulation, I figure to myself that they stroked thy head and blessed thee, pronouncing thee one of the chosen ; and thou hast my wishes that thou mayst be not one of the chosen, but the chosen one : and may the virgin's blessing fall not only twenty fold, but twenty thousand fold, not upon thy head, but in thy pocket. Should this take place, as I think it not improbable that the maidens should do all in their power to reward their profelyte, I hope thou wilt, in future, be less severe upon thy friend's vice, and remember they have done thee better service than thine own virtues. This generous wish must, I think, convince thee I have one christian attribute—that of forgiveness : for, after
thy

thy distrust of thy friend's honour, thou deservest nothing from me but reproach.

I have a great inclination to rob thee of thy new blown laurels, by writing an answer to thy letter, which shall convince thy aunts I am fitter for one of the elect than thou art. I know thy rashness is such thou wouldst not refrain from hearing thy friend praised, wer't thou sure the display of his superior sanctity would disinherit thee. That last word has determined me to try my fortune; and I now proceed to write such an answer as I should have given to thine, had it been written by one of the ladies in question; with this difference only, that I shall address thee as my friend, lest thou shouldst suspect I thought the epistle had come from an old woman.

As I must take a turn or two about my room to acquire a proper degree of solemnity,

nity, I will here bid thee adieu, wishing
thee a cleansing draught, as thy imagina-
tions are as foul as Vulcan's stithy.

Thine, more than thou meritest,

WILLIAM LESLEY.

LETTER XX.

THE SAME TO THE SAME.

I AM sure my friend will be concerned when he is told, that the contents of his last letter has filled my mind with inquietude; the idea of the virtuous, the the innocent, the amiable Lady C——, having suffered in the opinion of the world, through her intimacy with me, gives cause sufficient for distress; added to which, I have the additional wrong of being suspected (by the man I most love on earth; the man whose good opinion is necessary to my happiness,) of being capable of breaking through every tie of honor, gratitude, and religion. Let me ask you Mackenzie, what act of baseness and depravity has stained my life, which could

could give birth to the degrading sentiments you entertain of me? I till this hour have thought my character a fair one, and see with the deepest regret the blot it has undeservedly incurred; that I do not merit the present censure of the world I do most solemnly aver; I am equally confident I shall never justify your suspicions of what may happen in future; that I admire Lady C—— is certain; that I think her calculated to make any man, (who was not blind to her worth and perfections) happy, is also certain; nor will I scruple to declare, that I prefer her society to that of every other woman, and for the best of reasons, as I am made wiser and better. By the goodness of her head and heart, she blends pleasure with instruction, possesses every feminine grace; but is destitute of all the weaknesses usually ascribed to her sex; thus much I have said in justice to her, and now let me vindicate myself.

I have

I have acknowledged I admire her, I must want sense if I did not, for she is worthy; I will add, I respect and esteem her, but here my devotion ends; I do not love her, yet would I do any thing to oblige or serve her; but it would be for her sake; I should be no father interested, than as her happiness or pleasure were concerned; no selfish motive would influence my exertions in her favor.

I have said thus much to shew you it will require no struggle with my heart to preserve the peace of Lord C——, and the honor of Lady Bridget. I must now go a little further, and inform you, my friend, that were I in the situation he supposes me to be, deeply attached to the wife of Lord C——, I should prove myself to be superior to the infamous weakness of which he suspects me; I feel something in my bosom that tells me the highest wordly gratification could not repay

pay me for the loss of my own esteem, which must follow the seduction of this amiable woman. No, Mackenzie, after such an act I never could have known the blessing of a composed mind; the bare idea fills me with horror; and I could almost detest you for thinking me guilty of such baseness; the honor and happiness of Lady Bridget are dear to me, and worlds could not bribe me to be the spoiler of them; were she less revered by me than she is, yet would the obligation I am under to her lord for ever protect her; but, why do I talk thus? what vanity leads me to such presumption? Lady B—— will be her own protector, her virtue needs no guard; she is superior to temptation, intimately as I have known her, and attentively as I have observed, I never yet saw the moment I could have dared to take the smallest liberty that was not warranted by the custom of the world, and the company we were in; for at the numerous

merous times I have had the honour to be alone with her, the whole of her deportment has been regulated by the most exact delicacy ; nor could I, on those occasions, have treated her with the same freedom I would have done perhaps an hour before, when we were surrounded by witnesses. She is ever the easy, elegant, well-bred woman ; but her spirits are apt to hurry her beyond the bounds of moderation, which gives her the appearance and character of levity ; for it is always in company she gives them the ascendancy over her. The moment she is retired from the fashionable throng, she becomes the rational, placid, entertaining, and instructive companion. Now think you, Charles, this is a woman likely to fall ? No : it is not possible she should ; she gives no opportunities that can be taken advantage of ; at least, if there is any man that could presume upon the indulgence she gives, it must be one, indeed, with a more daring spirit

spirit than your friend will ever possess ; for I would as soon face an enraged lion, as presume to whisper an improper thought, or take the least liberty with her person : I am convinced, had I the audacity to make the attempt, the first moment of my offending, would be the last of my being admitted to her presence.

I trust this will put an end to all your doubts and uneasiness on my account, and convince you there is no occasion for my flying from a place where I am happier than I can be in any other ; my mind is here kept in a constant hurry of dissipation, which prevents my thinking on any subject, or so totally engrossed by the unpleasant situation of this valuable woman, that I can think of no other concerns than her's.

She is at present in bad health ; the faded roses of her cheek, give the intelligence

gence which her tongue refused ; and forced from her an unwilling confession of what it was no longer in her power to conceal. Her lord has summoned every physician of eminence the town affords, to her assistance ; and, in so doing, he seems to think he has done enough ; for, to their care he leaves her, contenting himself with a daily visit, which is seldom longer than a few minutes ; and those, after the common enquiries respecting her health, are spent in describing the progress he has made in a Venus, extolling the genius of some professional friend, or in recapitulating the beauties of Titian. I have observed, short as these visits are, they greatly disturb her : it is easy to perceive that she is shocked by his want of tenderness and feeling ; indeed I am afraid she is far from happy ; she has lost the hope of ever recovering his strayed affection, and it is this which preys upon her constitution : yet, no complaint against him ;

him ; no repining word escapes her lips. She suffers with such a gentle, composed demeanour, that I can almost persuade myself Shakespear had her in his mind, when he drew his picture of patience on a monument, smiling at grief. Happy am I that I have it in my power, in a small degree, to render her present confinement less irksome than it would have been had I been absent, as I have dedicated much of my leisure time to her, which has taken her from her thoughts. I cannot conclude without thanking my dear Charles for the solicitude he has shewn for the preservation of my honour and peace ; and he may rely upon my endeavours to merit the continuance of his regard, which I reckon among my most valued possessions ; nor will this fresh instance of his affection ever be forgotten by his grateful and obliged,

WILLIAM LESLEY.

P. S. Well

P. S. Well Mac, how do you like this performance? is it not just the answer you wished for yourself, instead of the old ladies? I know it is; and you should have had it at first, had I not been offended at the mean opinion you entertained, not only of me, but of Lady Bridget. You gave us credit for no one single virtue, but concluded there was nothing wanting to make her a prostitute, and me a scoundrel, but our having an inclination for each other. Oh, fine, Charles! I hope you judged not from yourself; yet, I think, in some part of your letter you said you did: if that is the case, I advise you to remain with your aunts, where you are sure not to meet temptation, for you are one of those virtuous souls, which are extremely honest, having never been tempted to be otherwise; this world contains many such, though, in one respect, they differ from you: your province is, by timely warning, to prevent crimes; their's
is

is to censure them when committed. The latter is the most profitable employment, as slander is always sure of a good reception, which is seldom the fate of unpleasant advice; however well meant or beneficial it may be. Do not let this discourage you; proceed on the occupation you have taken up; keep me in mind, that over my head there is a house, under my feet there is a well; that the one may fall on me, or I fall into the other. Warn me to shun that man, lest he be a rogue; or that woman, because she is virtuous; for, by your account, this alone can make her dangerous. Adieu, my Mentor, and may I never prove an ungrateful Telemachus.

LETTER

LETTER XXI.

THE HONOURABLE CHARLES MACKENZIE

TO WILLIAM LESLEY, ESQ.

I BEG your pardon, Lesley, for supposing you possessed the same degree of sensibility which nature has implanted in the bosom of most of her children: I shall henceforward know you better, and reserve all my anxiety and compassion for those you render miserable, without ever believing it possible you should feel for, or partake of their distress: among those unfortunates, the amiable, the accomplished Lady C—— will be entitled to my tenderest pity! Oh, might it atone for the cruelty of him who has robbed her of her affection, by his insidious attentions!

who has taken the advantage her unfortunate situation gave him to steal into her heart, and destroy her peace for ever, by filling that heart, till now unknown to guilt, with thoughts which lead to crimes that tend to the dishonour of her lord, and her own eternal infamy! But what avail her thoughts? her person is safe, for the man she loves, loves not in return! he is above such weakness! her distress affects not him—he will say he never asked her love, he only exerted his every power to charm and to delight her: and must she, because she had been treated with coldness and neglect by her husband, be sensible of, and grateful for his unceasing attentions! or, if she was, he could not keep it; he would continue to give fuel sufficient to feed the flame he had kindled in her breast from expiring, by obtruding his perfections for ever to her view. He would drive from her mind all recollection that she was the property of another;

or,

or, if the painful remembrance would not be entirely excluded, but sometimes, in spite of his presence, intrude itself, it would only contribute to render still more conspicuous the defects and inattention of the man she had wedded, and of course serve to bind her perfidious friend more forcibly to her heart.

And is it thus, William, you acquit yourself of your obligations to Lord C——? Is it thus you prove your respectful friendship for his wife? Yes: and, I fear, the period is not far distant, when they will both have reason to curse the evil chance which brought you to their knowledge, and which has proved the bane of their domestic happiness. Depend upon it, you will then repent you did not listen to the voice of friendship, which would have warned you of the rock on which you will at least have wrecked the peace of others: for, if this lord's feelings

I 2 are

are at all in conformity to mine, it will give him but little comfort to know he possesses his wife's person, because the man who has her heart is too cold or too indolent to rob him of it. That her heart is your's, every tongue proclaims; nay, every syllable of your last letter confirms it. Is it possible, then, that you alone are ignorant of her attachment? I would fain believe you are: yet, I know not how to account for such uncommon blindness. Awake! awake, my dear Lesley! no longer let your faculties lie dormant; rub the mist from your eyes, which has obscured your sight. Observe the altered conduct and drooping health of Lady Bridget, and you will be convinced of what every body else has been long acquainted with: and, if you are the Lesley I have so long loved—if you are the man of honour you would be thought, the moment of this discovery will be the last of your remaining with this amiable sufferer;

sufferer ; for every moment is adding to her malady, and your indiscretion. This is all I shall say on this subject ; nor shall I, at present, give any answer to your ridiculous epistle, further than to remark, if I have derived, as you say, my sentiments of honour and integrity from my aunts, I ought not to covet more at their hands, as they have already given me never-failing treasures, treasures I should be sorry to think you wanted ; but which I should, in that case, be happy to share with you, as well as any other real good which Providence, or the world, may bestow upon me, for you know not with what sincerity I am

Your's,

CHARLES MACKENZIE.

LETTER XXII.

WILLIAM LESLEY ESQ. TO THE HONOUR-
ABLE CHARLES MACKENZIE..

I GO for Oxford to-morrow morning;
delicacy detains me here till that time.
Adieu, and believe me your truly
grateful

WILLIAM LESLEY.

LETTER

31

LETTER XXIII.

LADY BRIDGET C—— TO LADY ANN
FITZROY.

I HAVE been ill, my dear Ann; I would some other pen had been to inform you of it, and to have added, that the hand which now guides, and the heart which dictates to it, were cold and insensible; for never more shall pleasure be an inmate of the one, or acts of cheerfulness employ the other. My remaining days (may they be few in number), must either be consigned to silent wretchedness, and murmuring discontent, or stained by infamy, and embittered by late repentance; which of those fates await me, it is not mine to determine.

I am no longer mistress of myself ; my heart and mind, nay, my very soul is in the possession of another ; and, with shame I confess, on his conduct, be it what it may, mine depends. So entirely am I his, that he has but to lead the way, and I shall follow him to perdition : as yet I am criminal in thought only ; had I been entirely lost, I had not dared to intrude myself on my virtuous friend, which I now do, to entreat her advice and assistance, if possible, to save me from destruction. Will she not, in the moment of distress, reach out her supporting hand ? Will she deign to lead her weak companion from the verge of the precipice to which she has unthinkingly wandered, and over which she must inevitably fall, if not speedily drawn back ! Oh, do not, then, lose a moment, but fly to my relief ! your presence will protect me ; you shall be my guardian angel ; you shall, if possible, reconcile me to myself, and save me from

Lesley.

Lesley. This is a name you are unacquainted with ; I would to heaven I were so too ; for many, many hours of misery shall I pay back for those of happiness, his society has afforded me. You, my friend, who know the insipid uninteresting life (to speak no harsher of it) that I have lived with Lord C——, will not wonder at my being charmed with the company and conversation of a man, differing from his lordship in every particular: let me not be supposed to speak slightly of my husband, who possesses many virtues, and is deserving of respect both for his mental and acquired abilities, As a man, I esteem him ; as a friend, I value him ; but, as the partner of my heart, I cannot think of him : yet, he once possessed that, and might have ensured it his for ever ; but the time is past, and cannot be recovered. May he never have cause to repent the little pains he took to preserve it ! For, whatever imprudence my future

life may be marked with, will originate in his indifference and neglect. Has not my home, being joyless, driven me abroad? Has not my being destitute of real happiness, induced me to seek artificial, by plunging me into dissipation? and has he not encouraged me in the pursuit of pleasure? Yes, he has; conscious of his own unkindness, he strove to make atonement by these unsubstantial tokens of regard: even the society of the man who now causes my heart to bleed, has been forced on me by this unthinking husband. Indeed, my Ann, I early saw my danger, and would have avoided by retreating from it, but I was not permitted. This infatuated man's happiness seemed complete when Mr. Lesley was his guest, or rather mine: for his share in the visit, as with all my other company, was, in giving the invitation.

Thus

Thus was I hourly exposed to the conversation and attention of the most accomplished of human beings; and this, while my wounded pride and mortified heart would have made me sensible to less powerful attractions than those I had to contend with: how, then, could I escape? Oh, suffer me, my friend, to plead my cause, and to produce every mitigating circumstance that can operate to lessen your opinion of my crime; for I feel, after every palliation that art can invent, or friendship admit, there will be much, very much in my conduct to condemn; and, could my Aunt know the thoughts that have passed in my heart, she would discard me from her's as unworthy a place in so spotless a mansion. Would you conceive it possible that the wife of Lord C—— has repined at the absence of Mr. Lesley, and has impatiently waited for the moment in which he should declare himself her lover! nay, that she has even

determined to throw off the delicacy of her sex, and inform him of the interest he has in her heart ; nor has the horror with which she recollected such unworthy ideas been sufficient to prevent their again returning. But I am thankful to heaven, my timidity, when in his presence, has hitherto baffled the disgraceful resolutions I have made in his absence, and he is yet ignorant of my unhappy attachment. I am equally so as to the place I hold in his heart, as he has never once breathed an accent that friendship might not warrant: yet, his unremitted attention, his anxiety and tenderness during my illness ; but, above all, his decided preference of my company to that of every other woman, and visible uneasiness if he sees me particular to any of my male acquaintance, gives me room to hope he returns my affection.

What

What have I said!—Ought I not to petition heaven that he might not return my ill-fated, criminal passion? Yes; honour tells me I ought; but I cannot obey her mandates. I know what she prescribes, and my heart bleeds that I cannot fulfil her laws; but it is impossible; I shrink back from the effort; my soul is even incapable of supporting the trial! What, then, is to become of me! should Lesley despise, or look with coldness on the wretch he has made, my misery is certain; for the only gleam of pleasure which now visits my bosom, arises from the hope that I have a place in his: that hope destroyed, my sun of happiness is set never to rise again: should he, on the other hand, approve my love, and give me his in return, what is to follow? I dare not reflect on the probable calamities such an attachment would draw on my own head, but the idea that he would be involved in my disgrace, is more than I can

can bear : all griefs are small when compared to that. Come then, my dear and valued friend, and, by your presence, dispel the storm which threatens to burst, and pour forth its fury on my devoted head ! You alone can save me ; come then, quickly !—come, be the guardian of my honour, and be entitled to the gratitude of my future life.

BRIDGET C—.

LETTER

LETTER XXIV.

WILLIAM LESLEY, ESQ. TO THE HONOUR-
ABLE CHARLES MACKENZIE.

YOU will be surprized, Charles, to find my letter still dated from London; and still more so, when you know the motive which detains me here—a motive I am so far from approving, that I feel my cheek glow with shame at the thought of acknowledging it to you. Nothing but my resolution to repose the unlimited confidence in you your friendship merits, would have induced me to expose my weakness.

After I had sent off the note to inform you of my intended departure, I
went

went from my lodgings with intent to acquaint Lord C—— that an unexpected call obliged me to leave town the next day. On my way to his lordship's house, I saw the carriage of a lady to whom I had been some time engaged for the following evening, waiting at the door of a jeweller's shop: I thought this would be a good opportunity for me to make my excuse in person, and for this purpose went in. There were several persons in the shop, and the lady in question sat at the further end of it: without observing who were present, I went directly up to her, but was soon surprised by hearing a female voice exclaim, "Heavens! it is Lesley!" and, before I could distinguish from whence it came, the same voice added, "I am very ill."

I approached the place where she sat, surrounded by those who had ran to her assistance, so that I was close to her before

I could

I could discover who it was. You will easily conceive my confusion, when I found it to be the perfidious Lady Vernon! She was pale, and appeared much agitated: all my wrongs rose to my mind, and I was on the point of returning to the lady I had quitted, when I saw the eyes of the beautiful deceiver closed, and every sign of life forsake her. This was more than I could endure—I flew to her, and, taking her in my arms, bore her into the air; her head reclined upon my shoulder, and her cheek touched mine!

Oh, Mackenzie, what a moment was this! Had I worlds, I would give them to purchase such another; yet, it disordered my whole frame: I trembled, and could scarcely support myself under my lovely burden. I placed her in a chair; but, being unable entirely to relinquish my situation, I continued my arm about her waist, and, with my other hand, pressed

pressed one of her's. I was too much engrossed by the object of my cares to attend to any thing else, till one of the company, addressing Lord Vernon by name, first gave me information of his being present. At the sound, I startled from my happy position, and I can suppose, made a very guilty appearance, for I felt myself in the utmost confusion.

Matilda had now recovered; and Lord Vernon, in a fullen tone, told her, he was ready to attend her home; but added, "perhaps it would be more agreeable to your ladyship to remain in this company?" she replied, that her inclination and ability, as was too often the case with her, at this time drew different ways; as the first would certainly prompt her to continue with those who had shewn her such attention in her distress, but the latter cruelly forbid her the gratification. She then, in the most graceful manner, thanked

ed us for our kindness, and apologized for the trouble she had given. Here her lord interrupted her, saying, she had better address that part of the compliment to the gentleman who stood near her, as he had, with most commendable zeal, taken the whole on himself.

She now turned to me, and was proceeding to acknowledge her obligations, when he stopped her rudely, saying, "Madam, you must defer your politeness to another opportunity, as your servants wait." Having ended this civil speech, he led her, or rather pulled her to her carriage. The insult which he had given me, added to his brutality to her, had set my soul on fire, and I was on the point of telling him; he was neither a man nor a gentleman, when a look from Matilda, expressive of the tenderest love, charmed me, in an instant, into silence and good temper, and I returned to my lodgings with

with a heart overflowing with joy, and thinking of nothing less than my quitting town.

My happiness was of a short duration, and I have passed the three days which have since elapsed in a state of the most distracting inquietude. I hasten in the morning to a coffee house, which is in the neighbourhood of Lord Vernon; I there take possession of a window to watch the going out of her ladyship, and I think myself greatly repaid for the hours of expectation and uneasiness I endure, if I get a sight of the carriage which contains her; (this does not always happen.) I then, when the lateness of the hour forbids me to hope, or indeed to enjoy this blessing, pursue my old plan of seeking her in public places, but hitherto to no purpose. His lordship is not so difficult to find: I have twice encountered him, and both times endeavoured to affront him; once
by

by thrusting so violently by him as to nearly throw him down, and then laughed in his face at the exertion he was compelled to use to save himself from falling: the second time, he was conducting Lady Bridget C—— (to whom he seems very attentive) to her chair, when I stepped up, and treading pretty heavy on his toes, took her ladyship's hand, and led her off. I afterwards returned to the coffee room, to give him an opportunity of resenting my behaviour, but he took no other notice than by hurrying out of my way whenever I came near where he stood; and, at the same time, cautioning his friends to give me room, in a manner which intimated I was a bear of a fellow, whom it would be dangerous to obstruct. His lordship will probably find himself right, at least in the latter part of his conjecture; for I yet hope to repay myself for the injury he has done me, or expose him

him to the world as a coward, and a disgrace to his nobility.

: You will perceive, from what I have written, that I do not intend going from hence. Indeed, Charles, I do not know what I intend; my determinations are wild and various! oh, bear with my infirmities!—I hope that time, with the assistance of your counsel, will restore me to reason—I would I could add, tranquillity—but the effect this unlucky interview has had upon me, leaves me no room to expect I shall ever again know the blessing of content.

Write to me more frequently. Your letters will be now doubly acceptable; as they will, for a few moments, take me from myself, a companion I am weary of, and whose society I wish to shun, as being both dangerous and disagreeable. My
hour

hour for acting the lunatick is arrived; I must, therefore, leave you to occupy my daily station; pity, but do not despise, your poor

Unhappy Friend,

WILLIAM LESLEY.

LETTER

LETTER XXV.

LORD VERNON TO SIR HENRY DORSET.

My dear Sir Henry,

YOUR letter of congratulation was rather mal-apropos ; I fancy you had forgot three months were passed since I embraced the bonds of wedlock ; yet, you talk some nonsense about the honey-moon ; why, you blockhead, the most doating fool never presumed to infer, that lasted longer than till the new moon, which followed the joining of hands, and the separation of hearts : now, my blessed nuptials, were solemnized on the last day of the old ; so that there was not much time for us to exhaust our stock of honey ; notwithstanding,
which

which my fair one, seemed averse to partaking of it with me, or indeed, any kind of sweets; ice and acids, it was apparent were her favorites; and I, like an obliging husband, have adopted her taste to such a degree, that the very name of *l'amour parfaite*, which was once a delicious cordial, is now disgusting to me. Oh, Harry! I have made a damnable business of it; I have married a beggar, and what is worse, a haughty one; who, notwithstanding her whole generation put together could not promote my interest one point, no, not if even bringing three votes towards choosing a member in parliament would do it, has the impudence to talk of being treated according to her birth: all this I could bear, if she even affected to shew common regard to my person, but she does not; nay, I believe she studies how to render her aversion conspicuous, not only to me, but to the world; nor is this the worst, for her charming ladyship has given her heart,

K

where

where I doubt not she will, with the first opportunity give her person, and prove me, in spite of what I have said of her indifference, to be her *deer*.

To add to my mortification, the person she has fixed on for this purpose is a low fellow, who nobody knows; the son of a country attorney, or some such contemptible thing; one that Lord C—— has picked up in his hunt after curiosities; and in which he has shewn his taste as ridiculous, and his judgment as erroneous, as in most of the acquisitions he has gained by his researches; but like them, he answers the purpose for which he was obtained, either to please the lord or his lady; but it was the latter's inclination that was consulted on this occasion; as his lordship prefers a piece of painted canvas, which time and the worms have made free with, to the company of all the belles and beaux which

these

these two terrible antagonists have got to display their talents upon.

This hero's (in question,) employment is, while his lordship is entertained with his dead venuses, to do all in his power to amuse his living one ; and in truth, she seems well satisfied with, and sensible of his endeavours, and, I am cursedly mistaken if she has not repaid them, by giving personal security ; and that he has no reason (whatever her lord may have) to complain, of either her honor or generosity: this alone, were sufficient to make me hate the fellow ; for to say the truth, I like her ladyship, and should have no objection to repay myself in her society, for the infernal disappointment I have met with, in the ill-star'd choice I have made. I have found out, Harry, though rather too late, that a wife's being beautiful will not make her husband happy ; if it would, I should be one of the happiest of human beings ;

beings; for Lady Vernon, in this particular excels most women; notwithstanding which I prefer most women to her: Lady C——, it is true, does not possess her personal charms, but there is an expression, a sensibility, a *je ne scai quoi*, in her manner, and conversation that bewitches; you always quit her with regret, and return to her with pleasure; at least, it is so with me; and directly the reverse are my sentiments, in regard to my own rib; for I never meet her but with regret, nor part from her but with pleasure: how is it possible it should be otherwise, when I see my presence is hateful to her, and that my endeavours to please, only serve to disgust; when I see another is in possession of her heart, can I, is it possible, I should love her? No, it is against nature, at least, against mine; I did love her, and gave proof, by raising her to rank and affluence; and had she been grateful, I could have loved her still: “oh, curse of marriage!

riage! that we can call these delicate creatures ours, but not their appetites:" So far from being grateful to me, for my condescension in stooping to connect myself with her, I absolutely believe, she thinks I am the obliged person; and that the favor she has done me, by becoming my wife, is to atone for her never doing me another: Indeed, I am become so indifferent about her favors, that I repine not, I was going to say, for the loss of them, but I never enjoyed them. From the hour of our being shackled, she shewed no part of her attachment had been to my person; for she was cold, melancholy, and thoughtful; at least, as much so as her nature would admit, for the winds are not so uncertain as her temper; she is either happy to a degree of wildness, or her gloom borders on despair: a ray of sunshine will cause the first; a cloud in the sky is equally efficacious to produce the second: she is steady in nothing, save her

dislike to me, unless it be her liking for another: this thought is a dagger to me; for though I have ceased to value her affection, I cannot endure another should possess it. It is certainly possible to be jealous without regarding the object of jealousy; for though I am not happy when alone with her, I am miserable if I but suppose any other man is.

Oh, Harry, Harry! I have made a pretty business of it; I shall become the laughing stock of every soul of my acquaintance, and most probably, of her devilish ladyship, and her country gallant; he I fancy wants to dignify himself, by fighting with a lord; for he has made several pretty bold attempts to quarrel with me; in so much, that I treat him as I would a wild beast, get as far from him as possible; and I shall likewise keep my Desdemona from his reach; for which purpose, I shall introduce her to my kindred in the
West.

West. In the mean time, I hope this huff bluff gentleman will meet some hot-headed fool like himself, that will either send him into the other world, by shooting him through the head, or to the gallows, for having been shot by him.

I think from this account, you will be able to form some idea of my connubial felicity; will it not induce you to follow so happy an example? if it does, it may likewise give you a desire to have one of the same breed; in which case my turtle has a sister, who, I dare say, if the offer was made, with proper humility, would deign to be Lady Dorset. I would make a tender of my interest, with Lady Vernon, on this occasion; but that I know, it would retard, rather than promote your suit: but as it often happens, though I cannot serve you myself, with my wife, I may tell you who can; so get this country beau, this Lesley, to speak a word for
K 4 you,

you, and your business is done. I wish you would think seriously of this, or rather, that you would not think at all; for then, you would not do it. Desperate acts are not to be considered of before hand; there will be time enough for that afterwards: plunge then, dear Harry, and do it speedily, for I am most cursedly out of countenance; could I prevail on a few of my friends, to do as I have done, to play the fool, and be as miserable as I am, it would very much reconcile me to my situation; you see you have it in your power to oblige me, who am at all times with perfect devotion,

Your's,

VERNON.

LETTER

LETTER XXVI.

LADY VERNON TO MISS HOWARD.

My dear, dear Emma,

I HAVE long purposed thanking you, for the kind and instructive letter you wrote to me, since my marriage; but while I was in that gloomy country-house of his lordship's, and where he has thought proper to bury me, for almost three months, I never could find spirits to do any thing; and now, that I am come to town, they are so great, and I am so overjoyed, that I am afraid I shall not write what you will approve; for I shall say just what comes into my head, and it is a very

giddy one, at this moment, as I have a thousand things to think of; for you must know, though I have been married these three months, I am looked upon as a bride, and must appear accordingly: and my lord has this morning informed me, that I must be presented to their majesties, to which you may be sure I made no objection; though, he was stupid enough to think I would; for he seemed surpris'd, and said it was the first proposal of his I had assented to; I told him what was very true, that it was the only thing he had ever proposed, that was not disagreeable; and so it was, for he is the most ill-natured, provoking man I ever knew; his manners are quite English, plain and rough; but apropos; now I am speaking of English manners, I will give you the particulars of my taking leave of a native of England; and one of France, on my return to town.

They

They had been very intimate at my lord's, during our residence at Sydney Forest, and happy it was for me they were ; for I should have died of vapors and *ennui*, had not their oddities kept me alive ; I say their oddities ; for either of them separated from the other, would have hastened my end ; as I must have been hurried out of the world, by the tumultuous vivacity of the gallic maniac, or moped to death by the solemnity of the British plodder ; the one was all jig, the other all dirge ; but by mixing them together, here a quick movement, then a slow, I played them off with tolerable success, till the moment of departure ; when Lord Vernon preferring a *tete-a-tete* with his horse, to one with his wife, rode and left me to the care of his groom ; at whose summons, and with whose assistance, I was going to get into my carriage, when I was agreeably surprized by seeing the before-mentioned gentlemen at the door of it ; each

eagerly contending who should have the honour of handing me in. The parisian, in all the foppery of dress (had an article been omitted) would have thought he had shewn his indifference to me by neglecting to render himself as charming as possible; while, on the other hand, the Englishman, regardless of every embellishment, appeared before me in perfect dishabille; but he, too, had his motive, as he meant to insinuate, his mind was too much engrossed with my approaching absence, to bestow a thought on any thing else.

These are conclusions of my own drawing, and formed from the few opportunities I have had of remarking on the natives of the two countries. I cannot help thinking that the French shew more judgment in these matters than my countrymen: if the former is in love, he studiously adorns his person—is all gaiety—sings—laughs—dances: his study is to
make

make the object of his wishes happier than any other man can, by being more agreeable to her than any other man is. The Englishman, perhaps, may have the same intention, but he takes a different mode to the completion of it; he appears before his mistress ill-dressed, and commonly ill-humoured, or low spirited, which is quite as bad. He is silent; or, if he speaks, it is in a despairing voice, and with a solemn countenance; he is a foe to mirth; he wishes to restrain the object of his love from all society but his own, yet forbears to make that pleasant to her: in short, he endeavours to win her by being as disagreeable as possible.

Oh, mercy! whither am I running to! I had forgot the poor gentlemen were waiting all this time with their hands held out. Well, imagine I gave to each a hand; and then, if you can, imagine you see the English brute let fall, with a discontented

contented look, his part of the favour, and retire surlily to some distance, as though he would say, "I will have all or none;" for this was really the case. I felt a little vexed, and was determined to punish him by giving particular employment to the polite Frenchman: to this end, I complained of the height of the step, and requested he would lift me in. He hesitated; looked at his hat and feather, as if it troubled him: at length, giving it cautiously into the hand of my attendant, he made an effort to lift me from the ground, but in vain; my weight was beyond his strength; he exclaimed, "Diable!" several times, and stood confused. The Briton now stepped forward, and taking me in one arm, put the poor Parisian out of his way with the other, while he placed me in the carriage, a look of triumph brightening up his countenance. The Frenchman shrugged up his shoulders, and said, with great good humour,

mour, "Ah, mon Dieu, my distress be so great it take away all my strength!" then laughing very heartily, he conjured me to comfort his despair by some mark of my favour before I departed. I thought the request reasonable, and, taking off my glove, presented it to him, and offered the hand I took it from to his companion. The former received his token with transport bordering on distraction; he kissed it a thousand times, clasped his hands, looked up to heaven, and, at length, thrust it into his bosom: the latter took my hand with all the sullen stupidity of a school-boy, who was taking a disagreeable task, and faintly touching it with his lips, coldly bowed, and turned away. I was beginning to chide myself for bestowing any mark of regard on such an unfeeling, heavy mortal, when a tear, which had fallen on my hand as he kissed it, turned my resentment into compassion, and I drove off with my heart beating in favour of English sincerity.

Yet,

Yet, this sincerity runs not through every rank of the inhabitants of this isle ! No : if I may be allowed to judge from the knowledge I have of the first order of people in this kingdom, little, very little of it is to be found among them : they are taught from their infancy to disguise their sentiments ; they wear a face of woe when their hearts are merry, but oftener a heart breaking with sorrow, when gladness and smiles sit on their brow.

Your Matilda is at present a novice in the art of disguising her feelings, but every day will lessen the difficulty. Ah, my sister ! had I earlier began the practice, I had not exposed my weakness which I did some mornings ago in a public shop, where I was surrounded by witnesses, and among them Lord Vernon, who has been out of humour with me ever since. I am almost afraid to tell you what I allude to, yet cannot conceal it from

from you. Know, then, the sight of Mr. Lesley, who I met by accident, affected me so much that I fainted : he, too, had his feelings ; for he trembled much as he supported me—he was very kind to me indeed. Ah, why, was he ever otherwise ! My lord seemed angry at his attention, and repaid it by being excessively rude to him, nor would he allow me to thank him ; but I will seize the first opportunity that I can find, to acknowledge my gratitude ; it may be a long time before that happens, unless I go to Lord C——’s ; for he, I am told, confines himself entirely to her ladyship’s company. But surely, Emma, when my brother comes to see me, which I every day expect, then Lesley will call to visit his school-fellow. Ah, my God, how I will rejoice to see him and my brother under the same roof with me !—I think I should then be happy. Heigho ! I am a great lady ; I have fine houses ; fine carriages ; fine
jewels ;

jewels, and a number of other fine things; but Lord Vernon is my husband. Oh, Emma! it cannot now be altered; I will therefore think no more of it.

Pray give my love and duty to my papa, but do not shew him this letter, for it will make him write to me gravely, and that will answer no other purpose but to make me melancholy; for I can never recollect his advice at the time it would be of service to me; and the pain I receive on the first perusal of his letters, deters me from ever giving them a second. But this he must not be made acquainted with either, as it would offend him, which I would not do for worlds; he is too good to me who deserves so little. Why, my sister, was I not formed with a disposition like your own—placid and serene! I had then assisted you to make my much loved father happy; as I am, I make no one, nor can be so myself; yet, I once thought,

possessing

possessing what I now possess, it would be impossible to be otherwise. Alas ! but I will have done, Emma, for I am in a strange humour ; I will not write again till I am in a better ; till when and forever, may my dear papa and you be blessed, and blest

Your

MATILDA VERNON.

LETTER

LETTER XXVII.

LORD VERNON TO SIR HENRY DORSET.

MY intended journey to the West is all off, unless I choose to take it solus ; for her ladyship has absolutely refused to accompany me : nay, she has positively declared she will not quit London, unless to return to her father ; but she has graciously added, that I am at liberty to go where I please, as she has no objection to my being absent from her as long a time as may suit my inclination. But I will give you pretty nearly the conversation which passed between us on my making the proposal ; it was a morning tete-a-tete : suppose me, then, just joined her at breakfast,

breakfast, and then take the dialogue as follows :

“ Good morning, my lady ;” (yawning)
“ the same to your lordship ;” with her eyes
fixed on something in an opposite corner
of the room—a dish of chocolate drank,
in perfect silence. At length, “ Was
your ladyship successful last night ?”
“ quite the reverse ; I was the only loser ;
every body beat me ; I have no luck.”
“ You have no skill ; you are ignorant, my
lady of the common rules of the game ;
you make yourself ridiculous by playing : I
wish you would give it up. Your lord-
ship is ignorant of the common rules of
good manners ; nor is that the only thing
by which you make yourself ridiculous.
I play for my amusement, without study-
ing your lordship’s wishes.” “ And with-
out studying my interest, too, madam ;
which I shall, henceforward, pay a little
more attention to than I have lately done,
by

by curtailings your ladyship's extravagance ; for I will not add to the number of my foolish actions, that of suffering you to ruin me. You see, I do not attempt to deny my having rendered myself ridiculous ; I know it would be in vain, unless I could, at the same time, deny your ladyship was entitled to bear my name." " I wish from my soul, my lord, you could as easily restore me my own, as I would thankfully part from your lordship's ; we might then be very good friends, which I do not believe will ever now be the case : perhaps you may deem my thoughts like my actions, extravagant ; but those are beyond your power to alter ; and as to my not studying your interest, you do me wrong, for I set out with examining your principle, which I found too bad to be improved by any effort of mine." " I perfectly understand your ladyship, and admire the sincerity of your confessions, which have removed every scruple of regret

gret I entertained at the idea of informing you, you are to leave your favourite London to-morrow!" "To go whither, my lord?" "Into Devonshire, my lady:" "Devonshire! I should as soon take a journey to the antipodes; I have particular dislike to Devonshire." "I take you there for my own amusement, without studying your ladyship's wishes." "Your lordship has a fine memory, therefore I hope you will not forget, that I here protest I will not quit London unless to return to my father." "I cannot compliment your ladyship's memory, as you seem to have entirely forgot you have bound yourself to obey: but it is my duty to keep you in mind of your promise, and I shall make this the first instance of my doing it: therefore, if you have any preparations to make, make them directly, for to morrow we begin our journey." "I cry your mercy, my lord! I had forgot; at least, feeling I could
not

not fulfil the whole of my promise, the two first articles being impossible, I thought your lordship's pride would prevent your acceptance of obedience that was neither dictated by love or honour. In this idea I held myself released, and am totally unprepared to fulfil my engagement; but, as I by no means wish to prevent your lordship's pleasures, I shall be happy to hear you continue your intention of visiting your Devonshire friends, and I likewise hope, you will find a companion for the journey who will make it more agreeable than I should. All I have to add on the occasion is, that I beg you to consult your own inclinations on this, as well as the length of your visit; for, you may rest assured, I shall not repine at either. Wishing your lordship a pleasant expedition, I take my leave:" and off she flounced, leaving me astonished at her courage, nay impudence! downright impudence! for who could have supposed

JOHN
a country

a country girl, who, six months since would have trembled at the presence of a man of my rank, should, in so very short a space, treat one who has taken her from obscurity and almost want, with such easy contempt! upon my soul I blush to think, Harry, how low I have fallen; nor dare I assert my right to obedience, lest she should shelter herself from my authority in the arms of her thundering inamorato, who would, if I even complained of the injury he had done me, reward me by cutting my throat. I wish to my soul, the devil had him and her high spirited ladyship, so I could hear nothing further of either of them; for I am afraid to return home, because I must encounter the tongue of the one, and I am almost afraid to go abroad lest I should be compelled to encounter the arm of the other.

Thus am I situated: tell me, Dorset, how you would act, for I can devise no

method of release for myself: I had it in contemplation to have this rural adonis impressed, and sent to a part of the world from whence it would have taken him some time to return, during which I might have slept in quiet, which I cannot now do: nothing would have been easier to have executed than this scheme, as I have a friend which my interest has raised to the rank of a captain in the navy, who would have settled the business for me without any noise: and I should certainly have employed him had not that booby, Lord C——'s countenancing the fellow in so particular a manner, deterred me: for I was sure, if the affair by any accident should transpire, I must forever forfeit his lordship's acquaintance, or rather his lady's, which is of much greater consequence. Indeed, I know it was in my power to regain his friendship, as I have, in my possession, a dead nun, on which he has cast the eyes of affection, and

and who, on being presented to him, would have pleaded for my pardon with irresistible eloquence: but I likewise knew all the dead nuns in the universe would not have atoned to, or made my peace with her ladyship, for the loss of her living *cicisbeo*. I therefore gave up my plan, and have not been able to form another; perhaps you may have a better head; it is at least less disturbed than I acknowledge mine to be, and, from that cause, more likely to study with effect. Assist me then, my dear Sir Harry, and bind me forever,

Your's,

VERNON

LETTER XXVIII.

LADY BRIDGET C—— TO LADY ANN
FITZROY.

THE hour of delusion is past, and your friend has quitted the paths of folly. I feel like one awakened from a frightful dream, the horror of which has left a terror on my spirits, and will not suffer me to enjoy the knowledge that it was but a dream.

Oh, my friend, congratulate me! I have obtained a conquest over myself! I am no longer the poor wretched creature I was when I last wrote to you! Mr. Lesley is no longer dangerous to me; his absence for some days has given me time to look into myself, and to reflect on the
situation

situation I was in. Reflection has recalled my wandered reason, and reason has led me back to the paths of honour, and has also made me sensible of their exquisite beauty. I now feel that there can be no happiness but while I tread them: yet, do not think that the cause of my error is less dear to me than at the moment I made you acquainted with my weakness. No: he is still an inmate of my heart, where I will cherish him as a friend; as a brother: he shall be my guardian angel, and bar the door against every other tempter; for the bosom he has once inhabited can never admit any other tenant; I feel myself armed against every future temptation; my husband's honour, too, is safe. Lesley shall be to me as a breast-plate of adamant, through which not even the darts of malice shall henceforward have power to penetrate. Wrapped up in the integrity of my heart, I will obey its dictates; I will cultivate the

L 3

friend-

friendship of this only man, with whom my soul panted to form a more tender attachment. But the fates have forbid, and I will cease to murmur at their decree; nor will I foolishly cast away the blessing they have not denied me, by foregoing the only society from which I derive pleasure. Happiness, I am sensible, can never be mine; I therefore have ceased to pursue it: hope has whispered me that tranquillity is not beyond my reach, and all my endeavours shall be to entice it back to my deserted breast, and to detain it there: nor will he that gave feeling to that breast refuse his aid, for he knows it has ever relied on his support.

Oh, my Ann, how much you have it in your power to surprize and entertain your gay friends, by informing them of this moral sentiment having fallen from the pen of the volatile, the dissipated Lady C——! But their astonishment would
be

be encreased, did they know that apparently thoughtless, vain woman, is in her heart a christian, a lover of virtue, and a studier of the Holy Scriptures; that she would prefer a sermon preached by Doctor D——, the Dean of R——, before listening to the finest strains of Pacchierotte, or even Mara; and so would they, did they think like rational beings. True, the latter gives me a momentary pleasure while heard; from the former I depart with a mind instructed, and a heart improved. My eye has been gratified by beholding elegant action, and a countenance beaming with benignity, expression, and sweetness; my ear charmed with a voice at once dignified and melodious; why should it then be matter of wonder that I, who am not a fool, give the preference where it is so eminently due, because fashion espouses the musician, and turns its back on the preacher! And, is it possible, that far the greater part of the world

world should be guided by this mock deity, which they themselves have set up! and that beings, endued with reason, should, though their inclination would have led them differently, be driven to meetings where they are not even entertained, (as is the case with many) and restrained by the same ridiculous tyrant, from attending those they were formed to comprehend, and from which they would derive essential benefit!

But I am strayed strangely from my subject, and moralizing ill becomes one whose whole life has been spent in folly; for, among the children of vanity, where is there one who has enrolled herself the slave of fashion, and obeyed its mandates with more fervility than myself: nor can I now, at the moment I am expressing my contempt of its followers, resolve to act for myself in future. No, I feel I shall still proceed, with my actions and my heart

heart at continual variance. It is time, however, I had concluded this not very polite condemnation of an idol which is so enthusiastically worshipped, particularly as it is addressed to one of its favourite votaries. But it will serve to shew my dear Ann, that her love-lorn friend is not so totally engrossed by her improper attachment to one object as she was a short time since, when she could neither think, write, or speak, on any other subject; and she yet has hopes to see herself restored to the good opinion of one, whose approbation, next to that of her own heart, will promote the felicity of her ever affectionate,

BRIDGET C——.

END OF VOL. I.

4 DE 58

ERRATA.

Page	Line	
143	4	<i>For deserve, read deserves</i>
150	5	<i>For does, read do</i>
156	19	<i>For vice, read vices</i>
167	12	<i>For fine, read fio</i>
170	17	<i>For keep, read help</i>
183	17	<i>Like to.</i>

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